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EUGENE O'NEILL

THE EMPEROR JONES

GOLD

"THE FIRST MAN"

THE DREAMY KID

PLAYS OF
EUGENE O'NEILL

Uniform with this edition

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GOLD
THE FIRST MAN
THE DREAMY KID

In one volume

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THE STRAW
BEFORE BREAKFAST

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ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS
and DIFF'RENT

In one volume

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS
THE HAIRY APE, and
WELDED

In one volume

EUGENE O'NEILL

P l a y s

THE EMPEROR JONES

GOLD

"THE FIRST MAN"

THE DREAMY KID



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NEW YORK

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FEB 7 1941

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THE EMPEROR JONES
(1920)

CHARACTERS

BRUTUS JONES, *Emperor*

HENRY SMITHERS, *A Cockney Trader*

AN OLD NATIVE WOMAN

LEM, *A Native Chief*

SOLDIERS, *Adherents of Lem*

The Little Formless Fears; Jeff; The Negro Convicts; The Prison Guard; The Planters; The Auctioneer; The Slaves; The Congo Witch-Doctor; The Crocodile God.

The action of the play takes place on an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines. The form of native government is, for the time being, an Empire.

SCENES

- SCENE I: In the palace of the Emperor Jones. Afternoon.
SCENE II: The edge of the Great Forest. Dusk.
SCENE III: In the Forest. Night.
SCENE IV: In the Forest. Night.
SCENE V: In the Forest. Night.
SCENE VI: In the Forest. Night.
SCENE VII: In the Forest. Night.
SCENE VIII: Same as Scene Two—the edge of the Great Forest. Dawn.

THE EMPEROR JONES

SCENE ONE

The audience chamber in the palace of the Emperor—a spacious, high-ceilinged room with bare, white-washed walls. The floor is of white tiles. In the rear, to the left of center, a wide archway giving out on a portico with white pillars. The palace is evidently situated on high ground for beyond the portico nothing can be seen but a vista of distant hills, their summits crowned with thick groves of palm trees. In the right wall, center, a smaller arched doorway leading to the living quarters of the palace. The room is bare of furniture with the exception of one huge chair made of uncut wood which stands at center, its back to rear. This is very apparently the Emperor's throne. It is painted a dazzling, eye-smiting scarlet. There is a brilliant orange cushion on the seat and another smaller one is placed on the floor to serve as a footstool. Strips of matting, dyed scarlet, lead from the foot of the throne to the two entrances.

It is late afternoon but the sunlight still blazes yellowly beyond the portico and there is an oppressive burden of exhausting heat in the air.

As the curtain rises, a native negro woman sneaks in cautiously from the entrance on the right. She is very old, dressed in cheap calico, bare-footed, a red bandana handkerchief covering all but a few stray wisps of white hair. A bundle bound in

colored cloth is carried over her shoulder on the end of a stick. She hesitates beside the doorway, peering back as if in extreme dread of being discovered. Then she begins to glide noiselessly, a step at a time, toward the doorway in the rear. At this moment, SMITHERS appears beneath the portico.

SMITHERS is a tall, stoop-shouldered man about forty. His bald head, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple, looks like an egg. The tropics have tanned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to a sickly yellow, and native rum has painted his pointed nose to a startling red. His little, washy-blue eyes are red-rimmed and dart about him like a ferret's. His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness, cowardly and dangerous. He is dressed in a worn riding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, spurs, and wears a white cork helmet. A cartridge belt with an automatic revolver is around his waist. He carries a riding whip in his hand. He sees the woman and stops to watch her suspiciously. Then, making up his mind, he steps quickly on tiptoe into the room. The woman, looking back over her shoulder continually, does not see him until it is too late. When she does SMITHERS springs forward and grabs her firmly by the shoulder. She struggles to get away, fiercely but silently.

SMITHERS. (*tightening his grasp—roughly*) Easy! None o' that, me birdie. You can't wriggle out, now I got me 'ooks on yer.

WOMAN. (*seeing the uselessness of struggling, gives way to frantic terror, and sinks to the ground, embracing his knees supplicatingly*) No tell him! No tell him, Mister!

SMITHERS. (*with great curiosity*) Tell 'im? (*Then scorn-*

fully) Oh, you mean 'is bloomin' Majesty. What's the gaime, any'ow? What are you sneakin' away for? Been stealin' a bit, I s'pose. (*He taps her bundle with his riding whip significantly*).

WOMAN. (*shaking her head vehemently*) No, me no steal.

SMITHERS. Bloody liar! But tell me what's up. There's somethin' funny goin' on. I smelled it in the air first thing I got up this mornin'. You blacks are up to some devilment. This palace of 'is is like a bleedin' tomb. Where's all the 'ands? (*The woman keeps sullenly silent. SMITHERS raises his whip threateningly*) Ow, yer won't, won't yer? I'll show yer what's what.

WOMAN. (*coweringly*) I tell, Mister. You no hit. They go—all go. (*She makes a sweeping gesture toward the hills in the distance*).

SMITHERS. Run away—to the 'ills?

WOMAN. Yes, Mister. Him Emperor—Great Father. (*She touches her forehead to the floor with a quick mechanical jerk*) Him sleep after eat. Then they go—all go. Me old woman. Me left only. Now me go too.

SMITHERS. (*his astonishment giving way to an immense, mean satisfaction*) Ow! So that's the ticket! Well, I know bloody well wot's in the air—when they runs orf to the 'ills. The tom-tom 'll be thumping out there bloomin' soon. (*With extreme vindictiveness*) And I'm bloody glad of it, for one! Serve 'im right! Puttin' on airs, the stinkin' nigger! 'Is Majesty! Gawd blimey! I only 'opes I'm there when they takes 'im out to shoot 'im. (*Suddenly*) 'E's still 'ere all right, ain't 'e?

WOMAN. Him sleep.

SMITHERS. 'E's bound to find out soon as 'e wakes up. 'E's cunnin' enough to know when 'is time's come. (*He goes to the doorway on right and whistles shrilly with his fingers in his mouth. The old woman springs to her feet and runs out of the doorway, rear. SMITHERS goes after her, reaching for his revolver*) Stop or I'll shoot! (*Then stopping—indifferently*) Pop orf then, if yer like, yer black cow. (*He stands in the doorway, looking after her*).

(*JONES enters from the right. He is a tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face—an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long-barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster complete his make up. Yet there is something not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off*).

JONES. (*not seeing anyone—greatly irritated and blinking sleepily—shouts*) Who dare whistle dat way in my palace? Who dare wake up de Emperor? I'll git de hide frayled off some o' you niggers sho'!

SMITHERS. (*showing himself—in a manner half-afraid and half-defiant*) It was me whistled to yer. (*As JONES frowns angrily*) I got news for yer.

JONES. (*putting on his suavest manner, which fails to cover*

up his contempt for the white man) Oh, it's you, Mister Smithers. *(He sits down on his throne with easy dignity)* What news you got to tell me?

SMITHERS. *(coming close to enjoy his discomfiture)* Don't yer notice nothin' funny today?

JONES. *(coldly)* Funny? No. I ain't perceived nothin' of de kind!

SMITHERS. Then yer ain't so foxy as I thought yer was. Where's all your court? *(sarcastically)* the Generals and the Cabinet Ministers and all?

JONES. *(imperturbably)* Where dey mostly runs to minute I closes my eyes—drinkin' rum and talkin' big down in de town. *(Sarcastically)* How come you don't know dat? Ain't you sousin' with 'em most every day?

SMITHERS. *(stung but pretending indifference—with a wink)* That's part of the day's work. I got ter—ain't I—in my business?

JONES. *(contemptuously)* Yo' business!

SMITHERS. *(imprudently enraged)* Gawd blimey, you was glad enough for me ter take yer in on it when you landed here first. You didn' 'ave no 'igh and mighty airs in them days!

JONES. *(his hand going to his revolver like a flash—menacingly)* Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss heah now, is you fergettin'? *(The Cockney seems about to challenge this last statement with the facts but something in the other's eyes holds and cows him).*

SMITHERS. *(in a cowardly whine)* No 'arm meant, old top.

JONES. *(condescendingly)* I accepts yo' apology. *(Lets his hand fall from his revolver)* No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now 's another.

You didn't let me in on yo' crooked work out o' no kind feelin's dat time. I done de dirty work fo' you—and most o' de brain work, too, fo' dat matter—and I was wu'th money to you, dat's de reason.

SMITHERS. Well, blimey, I give yer a start, didn't I?—when no one else would. I wasn't afraid to 'ire you like the rest was—'count of the story about your breakin' jail back in the States.

JONES. No, you didn't have no s'cuse to look down on me fo' dat. You been in jail you'self more'n once.

SMITHERS. (*furiously*) It's a lie! (*Then trying to pass it off by an attempt at scorn*) Garn! Who told yer that fairy tale?

JONES. Dey's some tings I ain't got to be tole. I kin see 'em in folk's eyes. (*Then after a pause—meditatively*) Yes, you sho' give me a start. And it didn't take long from dat time to git dese fool, woods' niggers right where I wanted dem. (*With pride*) From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some!

SMITHERS. (*with curiosity*) And I bet you got yer pile o' money 'id safe some place.

JONES. (*with satisfaction*) I sho' has! And it's in a foreign bank where no pusson don't ever git it out but me no matter what come. You didn't s'pose I was holdin' down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you? Sho'! De fuss and glory part of it, dat's only to turn de heads o' de low-flung, bush niggers dat's here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to 'em an' I gits de money. (*With a grin*) De long green, dat's me every time! (*Then rebukingly*) But you ain't got no kick agin me, Smithers. I'se paid you back all you done for me many times. Ain't I pertected you and

winked at all de crooked tradin' you been doin' right out in de broad day? Sho' I has—and me makin' laws to stop it at de same time! (*He chuckles*).

SMITHERS. (*grinning*) But, meanin' no 'arm, you been grabbin' right and left yourself, ain't yer? Look at the taxes you've put on 'em! Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry!

JONES. (*chuckling*) No, dey ain't *all* dry yet. I'se still heah, ain't I?

SMITHERS. (*smiling at his secret thought*) They're dry right now, you'll find out. (*Changing the subject abruptly*) And as for me breakin' laws, you've broke 'em all yerself just as fast as yer made 'em.

JONES. Ain't I de Emperor? De laws don't go for him. (*Judicially*) You heah what I tells you, Smithers. Dere's little stealin' like you does, and dere's big stealin' like I does. For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks. (*Reminiscently*) If dey's one thing I learns in ten years on de Pullman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact. And when I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years.

SMITHERS. (*unable to repress the genuine admiration of the small fry for the large*) Yes, yer turned the bleedin' trick, all right. Blimey, I never seen a bloke 'as 'ad the bloomin' luck you 'as.

JONES. (*severely*) Luck? What you mean—luck?

SMITHERS. I suppose you'll say as that swank about the silver bullet ain't luck—and that was what first got the fool blacks on yer side the time of the revolution, wasn't it?

JONES. (*with a laugh*) Oh, dat silver bullet! Sho' was

luck! But I makes dat luck, you heah? I loads de dice! Yessuh! When dat murderin' nigger ole Lem hired to kill me takes aim ten feet away and his gun misses fire and I shoots him dead, what you heah me say?

SMITHERS. You said yer'd got a charm so's no lead bullet'd kill yer. You was so strong only a silver bullet could kill yer, you told 'em. Blimey, wasn't that swank for yer—and plain, fat-'eaded luck?

JONES. (*proudly*) I got brains and I uses 'em quick. Dat ain't luck.

SMITHERS. Yer know they wasn't 'ardly liable to get no silver bullets. And it was luck 'e didn't 'it you that time.

JONES. (*laughing*). And dere all dem fool bush niggers was kneelin' down and bumpin' deir heads on de ground like I was a miracle out o' de Bible. Oh Lawd, from dat time on I has dem all eatin' out of my hand. I cracks de whip and dey jumps through.

SMITHERS. (*with a sniff*) Yankee bluff done it.

JONES. Ain't a man's talkin' big what makes him big—long as he makes folks believe it? Sho', I talks large when I ain't got nothin' to back it up, but I ain't talkin' wild just de same. I knows I kin fool 'em—I *knows* it—and dat's backin' enough fo' my game. And ain't I got to learn deir lingo and teach some of dem English befo' I kin talk to 'em? Ain't dat wuk? You ain't never learned ary word er it, Smithers, in de ten years you been heah, dough you knows it's money in you' pocket tradin' wid 'em if you does. But you'se too shiftless to take de trouble.

SMITHERS. (*flushing*) Never mind about me. What's this I've 'eard about yer really 'avin' a silver bullet moulded for yourself?

JONES. It's playin' out my bluff. I has de silver bullet moulded and I tells 'em when de time comes I kills myself wid it. I tells 'em dat's 'cause I'm de on'y man in de world big enuff to git me. No use'n deir tryin'. And dey falls down and bumps deir heads. (*He laughs*) I does dat so's I kin take a walk in peace widout no jealous nigger gunnin' at me from behind de trees.

SMITHERS. (*astonished*) Then you 'ad it made—'onest?

JONES. Sho' did. Heah she be. (*He takes out his revolver, breaks it, and takes the silver bullet out of one chamber*) Five lead an' dis silver baby at de last. Don't she shine pretty? (*He holds it in his hand, looking at it admiringly, as if strangely fascinated*).

SMITHERS. Let me see. (*Reaches out his hand for it*).

JONES. (*harshly*) Keep yo' hands whar dey b'long, white man. (*He replaces it in the chamber and puts the revolver back on his hip*).

SMITHERS. (*snarling*) Gawd blimey! Think I'm a bleedin' thief, you would.

JONES. No, 'tain't dat. I knows you'se scared to steal from me. On'y I ain't 'lowin' nary body to touch dis baby. She's my rabbit's foot.

SMITHERS. (*sneering*) A bloomin' charm, wot? (*Venomously*) Well, you'll need all the bloody charms you 'as before long, s' 'elp me!

JONES. (*judicially*) Oh, I'se good for six months yit 'fore dey gits sick o' my game. Den, when I sees trouble comin', I makes my getaway.

SMITHERS. Ho! You got it all planned, ain't yer?

JONES. I ain't no fool. I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't.

Dat why I make hay when de sun shine. Was you thinkin' I'se aimin' to hold down dis job for life? No, suh! What good is gittin' money if you stays back in dis raggedy country? I wants action when I spends. And when I sees dese niggers gittin' up deir nerve to tu'n me out, and I'se got all de money in sight, I resigns on de spot and beats it quick.

SMITHERS. Where to?

JONES. None o' yo' business.

SMITHERS. Not back to the bloody States, I'll lay my oath.

JONES. (*suspiciously*) Why don't I? (*Then with an easy laugh*) You mean 'count of dat story 'bout me breakin' from jail back dere? Dat's all talk.

SMITHERS. (*skeptically*) Ho, yes!

JONES. (*sharply*) You ain't 'sinuatin' I'se a liar, is you?

SMITHERS. (*hastily*) No, Gawd strike me! I was only thinkin' o' the bloody lies you told the blacks 'ere about killin' white men in the States.

JONES. (*angered*) How come dey're lies?

SMITHERS. You'd 'ave been in jail if you 'ad, wouldn't yer then? (*With venom*) And from what I've 'eard, it ain't 'ealthy for a black to kill a white man in the States. They burns 'em in oil, don't they?

JONES. (*with cool deadliness*) You mean lynchin' 'd scare me? Well, I tells you, Smithers, maybe I does kill one white man back dere. Maybe I does. And maybe I kills another right heah 'fore long if he don't look out.

SMITHERS. (*trying to force a laugh*) I was on'y spoofin' yer. Can't yer take a joke? And you was just sayin' you'd never been in jail.

JONES. (*in the same tone—slightly boastful*) Maybe I goes

to jail dere for gettin' in an argument wid razors ovah a crap game. Maybe I gits twenty years when dat colored man die. Maybe I gits in 'nother argument wid de prison guard was overseer ovah us when we're wukin' de road. Maybe he hits me wid a whip and I splits his head wid a shovel and runs away and files de chain off my leg and gits away safe. Maybe I does all dat an' maybe I don't. It's a story I tells you so's you knows I'se de kind of man dat if you evah repeats one word of it, I ends yo' stealin' on dis yearth mighty damn quick!

SMITHERS. (*terrified*) Think I'd peach on yer? Not me! Ain't I always been yer friend?

JONES. (*suddenly relaxing*) Sho' you has—and you better be.

SMITHERS. (*recovering his composure—and with it his malice*) And just to show yer I'm yer friend, I'll tell yer that bit o' news I was goin' to.

JONES. Go ahead! Shoot de piece. Must be bad news from de happy way you look.

SMITHERS. (*warningly*) Maybe it's gettin' time for you to resign—with that bloomin' silver bullet, wot? (*He finishes with a mocking grin*).

JONES. (*puzzled*) What's dat you say? Talk plain.

SMITHERS. Ain't noticed any of the guards or servants about the place today, I 'aven't.

JONES. (*carelessly*) Dey're all out in de garden sleepin' under de trees. When I sleeps, dey sneaks a sleep, too, and I pretends I never suspicions it. All I got to do is to ring de bell and dey come flyin', makin' a bluff dey was wukin' all de time.

SMITHERS. (*in the same mocking tone*) Ring the bell now an' you'll bloody well see what I means.

JONES. (*startled to alertness, but preserving the same careless tone*) Sho' I rings. (*He reaches below the throne and pulls out a big, common dinner bell which is painted the same vivid scarlet as the throne. He rings this vigorously—then stops to listen. Then he goes to both doors, rings again, and looks out*).

SMITHERS. (*watching him with malicious satisfaction, after a pause—mockingly*) The bloody ship is sinkin' an' the bleedin' rats 'as slung their 'ooks.

JONES. (*in a sudden fit of anger flings the bell clattering into a corner*) Low-flung, woods' niggers! (*Then catching SMITHERS' eye on him, he controls himself and suddenly bursts into a low chuckling laugh*) Reckon I overplays my hand dis once! A man can't take de pot on a bob-tailed flush all de time. Was I sayin' I'd sit in six months mo'? Well, I'se changed my mind den. I cashes in and resigns de job of Emperor right dis minute.

SMITHERS. (*with real admiration*) Blimey, but you're a cool bird, and no mistake.

JONES. No use'n fussin'. When I knows de game's up I kisses it good-by widout no long waits. Dey've all run off to de hills, ain't dey?

SMITHERS. Yes—every bleedin' man jack of 'em.

JONES. Den de revolution is at de post. And de Emperor better git his feet smokin' up de trail. (*He starts for the door in rear*).

SMITHERS. Goin' out to look for your 'orse? Yer won't find any. They steals the 'orses first thing. Mine was gone when I

went for 'im this mornin'. That's wot first give me a suspicion of wot was up.

JONES. (*alarmed for a second, scratches his head, then philosophically*) Well, den I hoofs it. Feet, do yo' duty! (*He pulls out a gold watch and looks at it*) Three-thuty. Sundown's at six-thuty or dereabouts. (*Puts his watch back—with cool confidence*) I got plenty o' time to make it easy.

SMITHERS. Don't be so bloomin' sure of it. They'll be after you 'ot and 'eavy. Ole Lem is at the bottom o' this business an' 'e 'ates you like 'ell. 'E'd rather do for you than eat 'is dinner, 'e would!

JONES. (*scornfully*) Dat fool no-count nigger! Does you think I'se scared o' him? I stands him on his thick head more'n once befo' dis, and I does it again if he comes in my way— (*Fiercely*) And dis time I leave him a dead nigger fo' sho'!

SMITHERS. You'll 'ave to cut through the big forest—an' these blacks 'ere can sniff and follow a trail in the dark like 'ounds. You'd 'ave to 'ustle to get through that forest in twelve hours even if you knew all the bloomin' trails like a native.

JONES. (*with indignant scorn*) Look-a-heah, white man! Does you think I'se a natural bo'n fool? Give me credit fo' havin' some sense, fo' Lawd's sake! Don't you s'pose I'se looked ahead and made sho' of all de chances? I'se gone out in dat big forest, pretendin' to hunt, so many times dat I knows it high an' low like a book. I could go through on dem trails wid my eyes shut. (*With great contempt*) Think dese ign'rent bush niggers dat ain't got brains enuff to know deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones? Huh, I s'pects not! Not on yo' life! Why, man, de white men went after me wid bloodhounds where I come from an' I jes' laughs at 'em. It's a shame to

fool dese black trash around heah, dey're so easy. You watch me, man. I'll make dem look sick, I will. I'll be 'cross de plain to de edge of de forest by time dark comes. Once in de woods in de night, dey got a swell chance o' findin' dis baby! Dawn tomorrow I'll be out at de oder side and on de coast whar dat French gunboat is stayin'. She picks me up, takes me to Martinique when she go dar, and dere I is safe wid a mighty big bankroll in my jeans. It's easy as rollin' off a log.

SMITHERS. (*maliciously*) But s'posin' somethin' 'appens wrong 'an they do nab yer?

JONES. (*decisively*) Dey don't—dat's de answer.

SMITHERS. But, just for argyment's sake—what'd you do?

JONES. (*frowning*) I'se got five lead bullets in dis gun good enuff fo' common bush niggers—and after dat I got de silver bullet left to cheat 'em out o' gittin' me.

SMITHERS. (*jeeringly*) Ho, I was fergettin' that silver bullet. You'll bump yourself orf in style, won't yer? Blimey!

JONES. (*gloomily*) You kin bet yo' whole roll on one thing, white man. Dis baby plays out his string to de end and when he quits, he quits wid a bang de way he ought. Silver bullet ain't none too good for him when he go, dat's a fac'! (*Then shaking off his nervousness—with a confident laugh*) Sho'! What is I talkin' about? Ain't come to dat yit and I never will—not wid trash niggers like dese yere. (*Boastfully*) Silver bullet bring me luck anyway. I kin outguess, outrun, outfight, an' outplay de whole lot o' dem all ovah de board any time o' de day er night! You watch me! (*From the distant hills comes the faint, steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrating. It starts at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse beat—*

72 to the minute—and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play).

(JONES starts at the sound. A strange look of apprehension creeps into his face for a moment as he listens. Then he asks, with an attempt to regain his most casual manner) What's dat drum beatin' fo'?

SMITHERS. (*with a mean grin*) For you. That means the bleedin' ceremony 'as started. I've 'eard it before and I knows.

JONES. Cer'mony? What cer'mony?

SMITHERS. The blacks is 'oldin' a bloody meetin', 'avin' a war dance, gettin' their courage worked up b'fore they starts after you.

JONES. Let dem! Dey'll sho' need it!

SMITHERS. And they're there 'oldin' their 'eathen religious service—makin' no end of devil spells and charms to 'elp 'em against your silver bullet. (*He guffaws loudly*) Blimey, but they're balmy as 'ell!

JONES. (*a tiny bit awed and shaken in spite of himself*) Huh! Takes more'n dat to scare dis chicken!

SMITHERS. (*scenting the other's feeling—maliciously*) Ter-night when it's pitch black in the forest, they'll 'ave their pet devils and ghosts 'oundin' after you. You'll find yer bloody 'air 'll be standin' on end before termorrow mornin'. (*Seriously*) It's a bleedin' queer place, that stinkin' forest, even in daylight. Yer don't know what might 'appen in there, it's that rotten still. Always sends the cold shivers down my back minute I gets in it.

JONES. (*with a contemptuous sniff*) I ain't no chicken-liver like you is. Trees an' me, we'se friends, and dar's a full moon comin' bring me light. And let dem po' niggers make all de

fool spells dey'se a min' to. Does yo' s'pect I'se silly enuff to b'lieve in ghosts an' ha'nts an' all dat ole woman's talk? G'long, white man! You ain't talkin' to me. (*With a chuckle*) Doesn't you know dey's got to do wid a man was member in good standin' o' de Baptist Church? Sho' I was dat when I was porter on de Pullmans, befo' I gits into my little trouble. Let dem try deir heathen tricks. De Baptist Church done pectect me and land dem all in hell. (*Then with more confident satisfaction*) And I'se got little silver bullet o' my own, don't forgit!

SMITHERS. Ho! You 'aven't give much 'eed to your Baptist Church since you been down 'ere. I've 'eard myself you 'ad turned yer coat an' was takin' up with their blarsted witch-doctors, or whatever the 'ell yer calls the swine.

JONES. (*vehemently*) I pretends to! Sho' I pretends! Dat's part o' my game from de fust. If I finds out dem niggers believes dat black is white, den I yells it out louder 'n deir loudest. It don't git me nothin' to do missionary work for de Baptist Church. I'se after de coin, an' I lays my Jesus on de shelf for de time bein'. (*Stops abruptly to look at his watch—alertly*) But I ain't got de time to waste on no more fool talk wid you. I'se gwine away from heah dis secon'. (*He reaches in under the throne and pulls out an expensive Panama hat with a bright multi-colored band and sets it jauntily on his head*) So long, white man! (*With a grin*) See you in jail sometime, maybe!

SMITHERS. Not me, you won't. Well, I wouldn't be in yer bloody boots for no bloomin' money, but 'ere's wishin' yer luck just the same.

JONES. (*contemptuously*) You're de frightenedest man evah

I see! I tells you I'se safe's 'f I was in New York City. It takes dem niggers from now to dark to git up de nerve to start somethin'. By dat time, I'se got a head start dey never kotch up wid.

SMITHERS. (*maliciously*) Give my regards to any ghosts yer meets up with.

JONES. (*grinning*) If dat ghost got money, I'll tell him never ha'nt you less'n he wants to lose it.

SMITHERS. (*flattered*) Garn! (*Then curiously*) Ain't yer takin' no luggage with yer?

JONES. I travels light when I wants to move fast. And I got tinned grub buried on de edge o' de forest. (*Boastfully*) Now say dat I don't look ahead an' use my brains! (*With a wide, liberal gesture*) I will all dat's left in de palace to you—and you better grab all you kin sneak away wid befo' dey gits here.

SMITHERS. (*gratefully*) Righto—and thanks ter yer. (*As JONES walks toward the door in rear—cautioningly*) Say! Look 'ere, you ain't goin' out that way, are yer?

JONES. Does you think I'd slink out de back door like a common nigger? I'se Emperor yit, ain't I? And de Emperor Jones leaves de way he comes, and dat black trash don't dare stop him—not yit, leastways. (*He stops for a moment in the doorway, listening to the far-off but insistent beat of the tom-tom*) Listen to dat roll-call, will you? Must be mighty big drum carry dat far. (*Then with a laugh*) Well, if dey ain't no whole brass band to see me off, I sho' got de drum part of it. So long, white man. (*He puts his hands in his pockets and with studied carelessness, whistling a tune, he saunters out of the doorway and off to the left*).

SMITHERS. (*looks after him with a puzzled admiration*) 'E's got 'is bloomin' nerve with 'im, s'elp me! (*Then angrily*) Ho—the bleedin' nigger—puttin' on 'is bloody airs! I 'opes they nabs 'im an' gives 'im what's what!

(*Curtain*)

SCENE TWO

The end of the plain where the Great Forest begins. The foreground is sandy, level ground dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes cowering close against the earth to escape the buffeting of the trade wind. In the rear the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence.

(JONES enters from the left, walking rapidly. He stops as he nears the edge of the forest, looks around him quickly, peering into the dark as if searching for some familiar landmark. Then, apparently satisfied that he is where he ought to be, he throws himself on the ground, dog-tired).

Well, heah I is. In de nick o' time, too! Little mo' an' it'd be blacker'n de ace of spades heahabouts. *(He pulls a bandana handkerchief from his hip pocket and mops off his perspiring face)* Sho'! Gimme air! I'se tuckered out sho' 'nuff. Dat sof' Emperor job ain't no trainin' fo' a long hike ovah dat plain in de brilin' sun. *(Then with a chuckle)* Cheer up, nigger, de worst is yet to come. *(He lifts his head and stares at the forest. His chuckle peters out abruptly. In a tone of awe)* My goodness,

look at dem woods, will you? Dat no-count Smithers said dey'd be black an' he sho' called de turn. (*Turning away from them quickly and looking down at his feet, he snatches at a chance to change the subject—solicitously*) Feet, you is holdin' up yo' end fine an' I sutinly hopes you ain't blisterin' none. It's time you git a rest. (*He takes off his shoes, his eyes studiously avoiding the forest. He feels of the soles of his feet gingerly*) You is still in de pink—on'y a little mite feverish. Cool yo'selfs. Remember you done got a long journey yit befo' you. (*He sits in a weary attitude, listening to the rhythmic beating of the tom-tom. He grumbles in a loud tone to cover up a growing uneasiness*) Bush niggers! Wonder dey wouldn't git sick o' beatin' dat drum. Sound louder, seem like. I wonder if dey's startin' after me? (*He scrambles to his feet, looking back across the plain*) Couldn't see dem now, nohow, if dey was hundred feet away. (*Then shaking himself like a wet dog to get rid of these depressing thoughts*) Sho', dey's miles an' miles behind. What you gittin' fidgety about? (*But he sits down and begins to lace up his shoes in great haste, all the time muttering reassuringly*) You know what? Yo' belly is empty, dat's what's de matter wid you. Come time to eat! Wid nothin' but wind on yo' stumach, o' course you feels jiggedy. Well, we eats right heah an' now soon's I gits dese pesky shoes laced up. (*He finishes lacing up his shoes*) Dere! Now le's see! (*Gets on his hands and knees and searches the ground around him with his eyes*) White stone, white stone, where is you? (*He sees the first white stone and crawls to it—with satisfaction*) Heah you is! I knowed dis was de right place. Box of grub, come to me. (*He turns over the stone and feels in under it—in a tone of dismay*) Ain't heah! Gorry, is I in de right place or isn't

I? Dere's 'nother stone. Guess dat's it. (*He scrambles to the next stone and turns it over*) Ain't heah, neither! Grub, whar is you? Ain't heah. Gorrry, has I got to go hungry into dem woods—all de night? (*While he is talking he scrambles from one stone to another, turning them over in frantic haste. Finally, he jumps to his feet excitedly*) Is I lost de place? Must have! But how dat happen when I was followin' de trail across de plain in broad daylight? (*Almost plaintively*) I'se hungry, I is! I gotta git my feed. Whar's my strength gonna come from if I doesn't? Gorrry, I gotta find dat grub high an' low somehow! Why it come dark so quick like dat? Can't see nothin'. (*He scratches a match on his trousers and peers about him. The rate of the beat of the far-off tom-tom increases perceptibly as he does so. He mutters in a bewildered voice*) How come all dese white stones come heah when I only remembers one? (*Suddenly, with a frightened gasp, he flings the match on the ground and stamps on it*) Nigger, is you gone crazy mad? Is you lightin' matches to show dem whar you is? Fo' Lawd's sake, use yo' haid. Gorrry, I'se got to be careful! (*He stares at the plain behind him apprehensively, his hand on his revolver*) But how come all dese white stones? And whar's dat tin box o' grub I hid all wrapped up in oilcloth?

(*While his back is turned, the LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS creep out from the deeper blackness of the forest. They are black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grubworm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking prone again. JONES turns about to face*

the forest. He stares up at the tops of the trees, seeking vainly to discover his whereabouts by their conformation).

Can't tell nothin' from dem trees! Gorry, nothin' 'round heah looks like I evah seed it befo'. I'se done lost de place sho' 'nuff! (*With mournful foreboding*) It's mighty queer! It's mighty queer! (*With sudden forced defiance—in an angry tone*) Woods, is you tryin' to put somethin' ovah on me?

(*From the formless creatures on the ground in front of him comes a tiny gale of low mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves. They squirm upward toward him in twisted attitudes. JONES looks down, leaps backward with a yell of terror, yanking out his revolver as he does so—in a quavering voice*) What's dat? Who's dar? What is you? Git away from me befo' I shoots you up! You don't?—

(*He fires. There is a flash, a loud report, then silence broken only by the far-off, quickened throb of the tom-tom. The formless creatures have scurried back into the forest. JONES remains fixed in his position, listening intently. The sound of the shot, the reassuring feel of the revolver in his hand, have somewhat restored his shaken nerve. He addresses himself with renewed confidence*).

Dey're gone. Dat shot fix 'em. Dey was only little animals—little wild pigs, I reckon. Dey've maybe rooted out yo' grub an' eat it. Sho', you fool nigger, what you think dey is—ha'nts? (*Excitedly*) Gorry, you give de game away when you fire dat shot. Dem niggers heah dat fo' su'tin! Time you beat it in de woods widout no long waits. (*He starts for the forest—hesitates before the plunge—then urging himself in with manful resolution*) Git in, nigger! What you skeered at? Ain't nothin' dere but de trees! Git in! (*He plunges boldly into the forest*).

SCENE THREE

In the forest. The moon has just risen. Its beams, drifting through the canopy of leaves, make a barely perceptible, suffused, eerie glow. A dense low wall of underbrush and creepers is in the nearer foreground, fencing in a small triangular clearing. Beyond this is the massed blackness of the forest like an encompassing barrier. A path is dimly discerned leading down to the clearing from left, rear, and winding away from it again toward the right. As the scene opens nothing can be distinctly made out. Except for the beating of the tom-tom, which is a trifle louder and quicker than at the close of the previous scene, there is silence, broken every few seconds by a queer, clicking sound. Then gradually the figure of the negro, JEFF, can be discerned crouching on his haunches at the rear of the triangle. He is middle-aged, thin, brown in color, is dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform and cap. He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, casting them out with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton. The heavy, plodding footsteps of someone approaching along the trail from the left are heard and JONES' voice, pitched on a slightly higher key and strained in a cheery effort to overcome its own tremors.

De moon's rizen. Does you heah dat, nigger? You gits more light from dis out. No mo' buttin' yo' fool head agin' de trunks an' scratchin' de hide off yo' legs in de bushes. Now

you sees whar yo'se gwine. So cheer up! From now on you has a snap. (*He steps just to the rear of the triangular clearing and mops off his face on his sleeve. He has lost his Panama hat. His face is scratched, his brilliant uniform shows several large rents*) What time's it gittin' to be, I wonder? I dassent light no match to find out. Phoo'. It's wa'm an' dat's a fac'! (*Wearily*) How long I been makin' tracks in dese woods? Must be hours an' hours. Seems like fo'evah! Yit can't be, when de moon's jes' riz. Dis am a long night fo' yo', yo' Majesty! (*With a mournful chuckle*) Majesty! Der ain't much majesty 'bout dis baby now. (*With attempted cheerfulness*) Never min'. It's all part o' de game. Dis night come to an end like everything else. And when you gits dar safe and has dat bankroll in yo' hands you laughs at all dis. (*He starts to whistle but checks himself abruptly*) What yo' whistlin' for, you po' dope! Want all de worl' to heah you? (*He stops talking to listen*) Heah dat ole drum! Sho' gits nearer from de sound. Dey's packin' it along wid 'em. Time fo' me to move. (*He takes a step forward, then stops—worriedly*) What's dat odder queer clickety sound I heah? Dere it is! Sound close! Sound like—sound like—Fo' God sake, sound like some nigger was shootin' crap! (*Frightenedly*) I better beat it quick when I gits dem notions. (*He walks quickly into the clear space—then stands transfixed as he sees JEFF—in a terrified gasp*) Who dar? Who dat? Is dat you, Jeff? (*Starting toward the other, forgetful for a moment of his surroundings and really believing it is a living man that he sees—in a tone of happy relief*) Jeff! I'se sho' mighty glad to see you! Dey tol' me you done died from dat razor cut I gives you. (*Stopping suddenly, bewilderedly*) But how you come to be heah, nigger? (*He stares fascinatedly at the other*

who continues his mechanical play with the dice. JONES' eyes begin to roll wildly. He stutters) Ain't you gwine—look up—can't you speak to me? Is you—is you—a ha'nt? (*He jerks out his revolver in a frenzy of terrified rage*) Nigger, I kills you dead once. Has I got to kill you ag'in? You take it den. (*He fires. When the smoke clears away JEFF has disappeared. JONES stands trembling—then with a certain reassurance*) He's gone, anyway. Ha'nt or not ha'nt, dat shot fix him. (*The beat of the far-off tom-tom is perceptibly louder and more rapid. JONES becomes conscious of it—with a start, looking back over his shoulder*) Dey's gittin' near! Dey's comin' fast! And heah I is shootin' shots to let 'em know jes' whar I is! Oh, Gorry, I'se got to run. (*Forgetting the path he plunges wildly into the underbrush in the rear and disappears in the shadow*).

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SCENE FOUR

In the forest. A wide dirt road runs diagonally from right, front, to left, rear. Rising sheer on both sides the forest walls it in. The moon is now up. Under its light the road glimmers ghastly and unreal. It is as if the forest had stood aside momentarily to let the road pass through and accomplish its veiled purpose. This done, the forest will fold in upon itself again and the road will be no more. JONES stumbles in from the forest on the right. His uniform is ragged and torn. He looks about him with numbed surprise when he sees the road, his eyes blinking in the bright moonlight. He flops down exhaustedly and pants heavily for a while. Then with sudden anger.

I'm meltin' wid heat! Runnin' an' runnin' an' runnin'! Damn dis heah coat! Like a straitjacket! (*He tears off his coat and flings it away from him, revealing himself stripped to the waist*) Dere! Dat's better! Now I kin breathe! (*Looking down at his feet, the spurs catch his eye*) And to hell wid dese high-fangled spurs. Dey're what's been a-trippin' me up an' breakin' my neck. (*He unstraps them and flings them away disgustedly*) Dere! I gits rid o' dem frippety Emperor trappin's an' I travels lighter. Lawd! I'se tired! (*After a pause, listening to the insistent beat of the tom-tom in the distance*) I must 'a' put some distance between myself an' dem—runnin' like dat—and yit—dat damn drum sounds jes' de same—nearer, even. Well, I guess I a'most holds my lead anyhow. Dey won't never catch

up. (*With a sigh*) If on'y my fool legs stands up. Oh, I'se sorry I evah went in for dis. Dat Emperor job is sho' hard to shake. (*He looks around him suspiciously*) How'd dis road evah git heah? Good level road, too. I never remembers seein' it befo'. (*Shaking his head apprehensively*) Dese woods is sho' full o' de queerest things at night. (*With a sudden terror*) Lawd God, don't let me see no more o' dem ha'nts! Dey gits my goat! (*Then trying to talk himself into confidence*) Ha'nts! You fool nigger, dey ain't no such things! Don't de Baptist parson tell you dat many time? Is you civilized, or is you like dese ign'rent black niggers heah? Sho'! Dat was all in yo' own head. Wasn't nothin' dere. Wasn't no Jeff! Know what? You jus' get seein' dem things 'cause yo' belly's empty and you's sick wid hunger inside. Hunger 'fects yo' head and yo' eyes. Any fool know dat. (*Then pleading fervently*) But bless God, I don't come across no more o' dem, whatever dey is! (*Then cautiously*) Rest! Don't talk! Rest! You needs it, Den you gits on yo' way again. (*Looking at the moon*) Night's half gone a'most. You hits de coast in de mawning! Den you's all safe.

(*From the right forward a small gang of negroes enter. They are dressed in striped convict suits, their heads are shaven, one leg drags limpingly, shackled to a heavy ball and chain. Some carry picks, the others shovels. They are followed by a white man dressed in the uniform of a prison guard. A Winchester rifle is slung across his shoulders and he carries a heavy whip. At a signal from the GUARD they stop on the road opposite where JONES is sitting. JONES, who has been staring up at the sky, unmindful of their noiseless approach, suddenly looks down and sees them. His eyes pop out, he tries to get to his feet and*

fly, but sinks back, too numbed by fright to move. His voice catches in a choking prayer).

Lawd Jesus!

(The PRISON GUARD cracks his whip—noiselessly—and at that signal all the convicts start to work on the road. They swing their picks, they shovel, but not a sound comes from their labor. Their movements, like those of JEFF in the preceding scene, are those of automatons,—rigid, slow, and mechanical. The PRISON GUARD points sternly at JONES with his whip, motions him to take his place among the other shovelers. JONES gets to his feet in a hypnotized stupor. He mumbles subserviently).

Yes, suh! Yes, suh! I'se comin'.

(As he shuffles, dragging one foot, over to his place, he curses under his breath with rage and hatred).

God damn yo' soul, I gits even wid you yit, sometime.

(As if there were a shovel in his hands he goes through weary, mechanical gestures of digging up dirt, and throwing it to the roadside. Suddenly the GUARD approaches him angrily, threateningly. He raises his whip and lashes JONES viciously across the shoulders with it. JONES winces with pain and cowers abjectly. The GUARD turns his back on him and walks away contemptuously. Instantly JONES straightens up. With arms upraised as if his shovel were a club in his hands he springs murderously at the unsuspecting GUARD. In the act of crashing down his shovel on the white man's skull, JONES suddenly becomes aware that his hands are empty. He cries despairingly).

Whar's my shovel? Gimme my shovel 'til I splits his damn head! *(Appealing to his fellow convicts)* Gimme a shovel, one o' you, fo' God's sake!

(They stand fixed in motionless attitudes, their eyes on the

ground. *The GUARD seems to wait expectantly, his back turned to the attacker. JONES bellows with baffled, terrified rage, tugging frantically at his revolver).*

I kills you, you white debil, if it's de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you agin!

(He frees the revolver and fires point blank at the GUARD's back. Instantly the walls of the forest close in from both sides, the road and the figures of the convict gang are blotted out in an enshrouding darkness. The only sounds are a crashing in the underbrush as JONES leaps away in mad flight and the throbbing of the tom-tom, still far distant, but increased in volume of sound and rapidity of beat).

SCENE FIVE

A large circular clearing, enclosed by the serried ranks of gigantic trunks of tall trees whose tops are lost to view. In the center is a big dead stump worn by time into a curious resemblance to an auction block. The moon floods the clearing with a clear light. JONES forces his way in through the forest on the left. He looks wildly about the clearing with hunted, fearful glances. His pants are in tatters, his shoes cut and misshapen, flapping about his feet. He slinks cautiously to the stump in the center and sits down in a tense position, ready for instant flight. Then he holds his head in his hands and rocks back and forth, moaning to himself miserably).

Oh Lawd, Lawd! Oh Lawd, Lawd! (*Suddenly he throws himself on his knees and raises his clasped hands to the sky—in a voice of agonized pleading*) Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer! I'se a po' sinner, a po' sinner! I knows I done wrong, I knows it! When I catches Jeff cheatin' wid loaded dice my anger overcomes me and I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong! When dat guard hits me wid de whip, my anger overcomes me, and I kills him dead. Lawd, I done wrong! And down heah whar dese fool bush niggers raises me up to the seat o' de mighty, I steals all I could grab. Lawd, I done wrong! I knows it! I'se sorry! Forgive me, Lawd! Forgive dis po' sinner! (*Then beseeching terrifiedly*) And keep dem away, Lawd! Keep dem away from me! And stop dat drum soundin'

In my ears! Dat begin to sound ha'nted, too. (*He gets to his feet, evidently slightly reassured by his prayer—with attempted confidence*) De Lawd'll preserve me from dem ha'nts after dis. (*Sits down on the stump again*) I ain't skeered o' real men. Let dem come. But dem odders—— (*He shudders—then looks down at his feet, working his toes inside the shoes—with a groan*) Oh, my po' feet! Dem shoes ain't no use no more 'ceptin' to hurt. I'se better off widout dem. (*He unlaces them and pulls them off—holds the wrecks of the shoes in his hands and regards them mournfully*) You was real, A-one patin' leather, too. Look at you now. Emperor, you'se gittin' mighty low!

(*He sighs dejectedly and remains with bowed shoulders, staring down at the shoes in his hands as if reluctant to throw them away. While his attention is thus occupied, a crowd of figures silently enter the clearing from all sides. All are dressed in Southern costumes of the period of the fifties of the last century. There are middle-aged men who are evidently well-to-do planters. There is one spruce, authoritative individual—the AUCTIONEER. There is a crowd of curious spectators, chiefly young belles and dandies who have come to the slave-market for diversion. All exchange courtly greetings in dumb show and chat silently together. There is something stiff, rigid, unreal, marionettish about their movements. They group themselves about the stump. Finally a batch of slaves is led in from the left by an attendant—three men of different ages, two women, one with a baby in her arms, nursing. They are placed to the left of the stump, beside JONES.*)

The white planters look them over appraisingly as if they were cattle, and exchange judgments on each. The dandies point with their fingers and make witty remarks. The belles

titter bewitchingly. *All this in silence save for the ominous throb of the tom-tom. The AUCTIONEER holds up his hand, taking his place at the stump. The groups strain forward attentively. He touches JONES on the shoulder peremptorily, motioning for him to stand on the stump—the auction block.*

JONES looks up, sees the figures on all sides, looks wildly for some opening to escape, sees none, screams and leaps madly to the top of the stump to get as far away from them as possible. He stands there, cowering, paralyzed with horror. The AUCTIONEER begins his silent spiel. He points to JONES, appeals to the planters to see for themselves. *Here is a good field hand, sound in wind and limb as they can see. Very strong still in spite of his being middle-aged. Look at that back. Look at those shoulders. Look at the muscles in his arms and his sturdy legs. Capable of any amount of hard labor. Moreover, of a good disposition, intelligent and tractable. Will any gentleman start the bidding? The PLANTERS raise their fingers, make their bids. They are apparently all eager to possess JONES. The bidding is lively, the crowd interested. While this has been going on, JONES has been seized by the courage of desperation. He dares to look down and around him. Over his face abject terror gives way to mystification, to gradual realization—stutteringly).*

What you all doin', white folks? What's all dis? What you all lookin' at me fo'? What you doin' wid me, anyhow? (*Suddenly convulsed with raging hatred and fear*) Is dis a auction? Is you sellin' me like dey uster befo' de war? (*Jerking out his revolver just as the AUCTIONEER knocks him down to one of the planters—glaring from him to the purchaser*) And you sells me? And you buys me? I shows you I'se a free nigger, damn

yo' souls! (*He fires at the AUCTIONEER and at the PLANTER with such rapidity that the two shots are almost simultaneous. As if this were a signal the walls of the forest fold in. Only blackness remains and silence broken by JONES as he rushes off, crying with fear—and by the quickened, ever louder beat of the tom-tom*).

SCENE SIX

A cleared space in the forest. The limbs of the trees meet over it forming a low ceiling about five feet from the ground. The interlocked ropes of creepers reaching upward to entwine the tree trunks give an arched appearance to the sides. The space thus enclosed is like the dark, noisome hold of some ancient vessel. The moonlight is almost completely shut out and only a vague wan light filters through. There is the noise of someone approaching from the left, stumbling and crawling through the undergrowth. JONES' voice is heard between chattering moans.

Oh, Lawd, what I gwine do now? Ain't got no bullet left on'y de silver one. If mo' o' dem ha'nts come after me, how I gwine skeer dem away? Oh, Lawd, on'y de silver one left—an' I gotta save dat fo' luck. If I shoots dat one I'm a goner sho'! Lawd, it's black heah! Whar's de moon? Oh, Lawd, don't dis night evah come to an end! (*By the sounds, he is feeling his way cautiously forward*) Dere! Dis feels like a clear space. I gotta lie down an' rest. I don't care if dem niggers does cotch me. I gotta rest.

(He is well forward now where his figure can be dimly made out. His pants have been so torn away that what is left of them is no better than a breech cloth. He flings himself full length, face downward on the ground, panting with exhaustion. Gradually it seems to grow lighter in the enclosed space and two rows of seated figures can be seen behind JONES. They are sit-

ting in crumpled, despairing attitudes, hunched, facing one another with their backs touching the forest walls as if they were shackled to them. All are negroes, naked save for loin cloths. At first they are silent and motionless. Then they begin to sway slowly forward toward each and back again in unison, as if they were laxly letting themselves follow the long roll of a ship at sea. At the same time, a low, melancholy murmur rises among them, increasing gradually by rhythmic degrees which seem to be directed and controlled by the throb of the tom-tom in the distance, to a long, tremulous wail of despair that reaches a certain pitch, unbearably acute, then falls by slow gradations of tone into silence and is taken up again. JONES starts, looks up, sees the figures, and throws himself down again to shut out the sight. A shudder of terror shakes his whole body as the wail rises up about him again. But the next time, his voice, as if under some uncanny compulsion, starts with the others. As their chorus lifts he rises to a sitting posture similar to the others, swaying back and forth. His voice reaches the highest pitch of sorrow, of desolation. The light fades out, the other voices cease, and only darkness is left. JONES can be heard scrambling to his feet and running off, his voice sinking down the scale and receding as he moves farther and farther away in the forest. The tom-tom beats louder, quicker, with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation).

SCENE SEVEN

The foot of a gigantic tree by the edge of a great river. A rough structure of boulders, like an altar, is by the tree. The raised river bank is in the nearer background. Beyond this the surface of the river spreads out, brilliant and unruffled in the moonlight, blotted out and merged into a veil of bluish mist in the distance. JONES' voice is heard from the left rising and falling in the long, despairing wail of the chained slaves, to the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom. As his voice sinks into silence, he enters the open space. The expression of his face is fixed and stony, his eyes have an obsessed glare, he moves with a strange deliberation like a sleep-walker or one in a trance. He looks around at the tree, the rough stone altar, the moonlit surface of the river beyond, and passes his hand over his head with a vague gesture of puzzled bewilderment. Then, as if in obedience to some obscure impulse, he sinks into a kneeling, devotional posture before the altar. Then he seems to come to himself partly, to have an uncertain realization of what he is doing, for he straightens up and stares about him horrifiedly—in an incoherent mumble.

What—what is I doin'? What is—dis place? Seems like I know dat tree—an' dem stones—an' de river. I remember—seems like I been heah befo'. (*Tremblingly*) Oh, Gorrry, I'se skeered in dis place! I'se skeered. Oh, Lawd, pertect dis sinner!

(Crawling away from the altar, he cowers close to the ground, his face hidden, his shoulders heaving with sobs of hysterical fright. From behind the trunk of the tree, as if he had sprung out of it, the figure of the CONGO WITCH-DOCTOR appears. He is wizened and old, naked except for the fur of some small animal tied about his waist, its bushy tail hanging down in front. His body is stained all over a bright red. Antelope horns are on each side of his head, branching upward. In one hand he carries a bone rattle, in the other a charm stick with a bunch of white cockatoo feathers tied to the end. A great number of glass beads and bone ornaments are about his neck, ears, wrists, and ankles. He struts noiselessly with a queer prancing step to a position in the clear ground between JONES and the altar. Then with a preliminary, summoning stamp of his foot on the earth, he begins to dance and to chant. As if in response to his summons the beating of the tom-tom grows to a fierce, exultant boom whose throbs seem to fill the air with vibrating rhythm. JONES looks up, starts to spring to his feet, reaches a half-kneeling, half-squatting position and remains rigidly fixed there, paralyzed with awed fascination by this new apparition. The WITCH-DOCTOR sways, stamping with his foot, his bone rattle clicking the time. His voice rises and falls in a weird, monotonous croon, without articulate word divisions. Gradually his dance becomes clearly one of a narrative in pantomime, his croon is an incantation, a charm to allay the fierceness of some implacable deity demanding sacrifice. He flees, he is pursued by devils, he hides, he flees again. Ever wilder and wilder becomes his flight, nearer and nearer draws the pursuing evil, more and more the spirit of terror gains possession of him. His croon, rising to intensity, is punctuated by shrill cries. JONES has

become completely hypnotized. His voice joins in the incantation, in the cries, he beats time with his hands and sways his body to and fro from the waist. The whole spirit and meaning of the dance has entered into him, has become his spirit. Finally the theme of the pantomime halts on a howl of despair, and is taken up again in a note of savage hope. There is a salvation. The forces of evil demand sacrifice. They must be appeased. The WITCH-DOCTOR points with his wand to the sacred tree, to the river beyond, to the altar, and finally to JONES with a ferocious command. JONES seems to sense the meaning of this. It is he who must offer himself for sacrifice. He beats his forehead abjectly to the ground, moaning hysterically).

Mercy, Oh Lawd! Mercy! Mercy on dis po' sinner.

(The WITCH-DOCTOR springs to the river bank. He stretches out his arms and calls to some God within its depths. Then he starts backward slowly, his arms remaining out. A huge head of a crocodile appears over the bank and its eyes, glittering greenly, fasten upon JONES. He stares into them fascinatedly. The WITCH-DOCTOR prances up to him, touches him with his wand, motions with hideous command toward the waiting monster. JONES squirms on his belly nearer and nearer, moaning continually).

Mercy, Lawd! Mercy!

(The crocodile heaves more of his enormous hulk onto the land. JONES squirms toward him. The WITCH-DOCTOR's voice shrills out in furious exultation, the tom-tom beats madly. JONES cries out in a fierce, exhausted spasm of anguished pleading).

Lawd, save me! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer!

(Immediately, in answer to his prayer, comes the thought of

the one bullet left him. He snatches at his hip, shouting defiantly).

De silver bullet! You don't git me yit!

(He fires at the green eyes in front of him. The head of the crocodile sinks back behind the river bank, the WITCH-DOCTOR springs behind the sacred tree and disappears. JONES lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power).

SCENE EIGHT

Dawn. Same as Scene Two, the dividing line of forest and plain. The nearest tree trunks are dimly revealed but the forest behind them is still a mass of glooming shadow. The tom-tom seems on the very spot, so loud and continuously vibrating are its beats. LEM enters from the left, followed by a small squad of his soldiers, and by the Cockney trader, SMITHERS. LEM is a heavy-set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin cloth. A revolver and cartridge belt are about his waist. His soldiers are in different degrees of rag-concealed nakedness. All wear broad palm-leaf hats. Each one carries a rifle. SMITHERS is the same as in Scene One. One of the soldiers, evidently a tracker, is peering about keenly on the ground. He points to the spot where JONES entered the forest. LEM and SMITHERS come to look.

SMITHERS. (*after a glance, turns away in disgust*) That's where 'e went in right enough. Much good it'll do yer. 'E's miles orf by this an' safe to the Coast, damn 's 'ide! I tole yer yer'd lose 'im, didn't I?—wastin' the 'ole bloomin' night beatin' yer bloody drum and castin' yer silly spells! Gawd blimey, wot a pack!

LEM. (*gutturally*) We cotch him. (*He makes a motion to his soldiers who squat down on their haunches in a semi-circle*).

SMITHERS. (*exasperatedly*) Well, ain't yer goin' in an' 'unt 'im in the woods? What the 'ell's the good of waitin'?

LEM. (*imperturbably—squatting down himself*) We cotch him.

SMITHERS. (*turning away from him contemptuously*) Aw! Garn! 'E's a better man than the lot o' you put together. I 'ates the sight o' 'im but I'll say that for 'im. (*A sound comes from the forest. The soldiers jump to their feet, cocking their rifles alertly. LEM remains sitting with an imperturbable expression, but listening intently. He makes a quick signal with his hand. His followers creep quickly into the forest, scattering so that each enters at a different spot*).

SMITHERS. You ain't thinkin' that would be 'im, I 'ope?

LEM. (*calmly*) We cotch him.

SMITHERS. Blarsted fat 'eads! (*Then after a second's thought—wonderingly*) Still an' all, it might 'appen. If 'e lost 'is bloody way in these stinkin' woods 'e'd likely turn in a circle without 'is knowin' it.

LEM. (*peremptorily*) Sssh! (*The reports of several rifles sound from the forest, followed a second later by savage, exultant yells. The beating of the tom-tom abruptly ceases. LEM looks up at the white man with a grin of satisfaction*) We cotch him. Him dead.

SMITHERS. (*with a snarl*) 'Ow d'yer know it's 'im an' 'ow d'yer know 'e's dead?

LEM. My mens dey got um silver bullets. Lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too.

SMITHERS. (*astonished*) So that's wot you was up to all night, wot? You was scared to put after 'im till you'd moulded silver bullets, eh?

LEM. (*simply stating a fact*) Yes. Him got strong charm. Lead no good.

SMITHERS. (*slapping his thigh and guffawing*) Haw-haw! If yer don't beat all 'ell! (*Then recovering himself—scornfully*) I'll bet yer it ain't 'im they shot at all, yer bleedin' looney!

LEM. (*calmly*) Dey come bring him now. (*The soldiers come out of the forest, carrying JONES' limp body. He is dead. They carry him to LEM, who examines his body with great satisfaction. SMITHERS leans over his shoulder—in a tone of frightened awe*) Well, they did for yer right enough, Jonsey, me lad! Dead as a 'erring! (*Mockingly*) Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' Majesty? (*Then with a grin*) Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow!

(*Curtain*)

GOLD

A Play in Four Acts

(1919)

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN ISAIAH BARTLETT, *of the whaling ship Triton*

SILAS HORNE, *boatswain of the Triton*

BEN CATES

JIMMY KANAKA, *an Islander* } *of the Triton's crew*

BUTLER, *cook of the Triton*

ABEL, *the ship's boy*

SARAH ALLEN BARTLETT, *the captain's wife*

SUE, *their daughter*

NAT, *their son*

DANIEL DREW, *officer of a freight steamer*

DOCTOR BERRY

GOLD

ACT ONE

SCENE. *A small, barren coral island on the southern fringe of the Malay Archipelago. The coral sand, blazing white under the full glare of the sun, lifts in the right foreground to a long hummock a few feet above sea-level. A stunted coco palm rises from the center of this elevation, its bunch of scraggly leaves drooping motionlessly, casting a small circular patch of shadow directly beneath on the ground about the trunk. About a hundred yards in the distance the lagoon is seen, its vivid blue contrasting with the white coral beach which borders its circular outline. The far horizon to seaward is marked by a broad band of purplish haze which separates the bright blue of the water from the metallic gray-blue of the sky. The island bakes. The intensity of the sun's rays is flung back skyward in a quivering mist of heat-waves which distorts the outlines of things, giving the visible world an intangible eerie quality, as if it were floating submerged in some colorless molten fluid.*

As the curtain rises, ABEL is discovered lying asleep, curled up in the patch of shade beneath the coco palm. He is a runty, undersized boy of fifteen, with a shrivelled old face, tanned to parchment by the sun. He has on a suit of dirty dungarees, man's size, much too large for him, which hang in loose folds from his puny frame. A thatch of brown hair straggles in limp wisps from under the peaked canvas cap he wears. He looks terribly exhausted. His dreams are evidently fraught with

terror, for he twitches convulsively and moans with fright. BUTLER enters hurriedly, panting, from the right, rear. He is a tall man of over middle age, dressed in the faded remainder of what was once a brown suit. The coat, the buttons of which have been torn off, hangs open, revealing his nakedness beneath. A cloth cap covers his bald head, with its halo of dirty thin gray hair. His body is emaciated. His face, with its round, blue eyes, is weathered and cracked by the sun's rays. The wreck of a pair of heavy shoes flop about his bare feet. He looks back cautiously, as if he were afraid of being followed; then satisfied that he is not, he approaches the sleeping boy, and bending down, puts his hand on ABEL's forehead. ABEL groans and opens his eyes. He stares about furtively, as if seeking someone whose presence he dreads to find.

ABEL. (in a husky voice) Where's Capt'n and the rest, Butts?

BUTLER. (in a hoarse, cracked whisper) On the beach—down there. (He makes an exhausted gesture, right, and then sinks with a groan at the foot of the tree, leaning back against the trunk, trying vainly to hunch his long legs up so as to be completely in the shade).

ABEL. (with avid eyes) They ain't found no water yet?

BUTLER. (shaking his head, his eyes closing wearily) No. How would they—when there ain't any—not on this devil's island—dry as a bone, my sonny—sand and sun—that's all.

ABEL. (with a sudden, shrill agony—his lips twitching) I need a drink of water—something awful! (With tremulous pleading) Say, ain't you got 'nother drink left?—honest, ain't you?

BUTLER. (looking around him cautiously) Not so loud! (Fix-

ing his eyes sternly on the boy) This is a dead secret, mind! You'll swear you won't blab—not to him?

ABEL. Sure, Butts, sure! Gawd strike me dead!

BUTLER. *(takes a pint bottle from the hip-pocket of his pants. It is about half full of water)* He—and the rest—they'd kill me like a dog—and you too, sonny—remember that!

ABEL. Sure! I ain't goin' to tell 'em, Butts. *(Stretching out his hands frenziedly)* Aw, give it to me, Butts! Give me a drink, for Christ's sake!

BUTLER. No, you don't! Only a few drops. It's got to last 'til a ship comes past that'll pick us up. That's the only hope. *(Holding the bottle at arm's length from the boy)* Hands down, now—or you don't get a drop! *(The boy lets his hands drop to his sides. BUTLER puts the bottle carefully to his lips, and allows the boy two gulps—then snatches it away)* That's all now. More later. *(He takes one gulp himself, and making a tremendous effort of will, jerks the bottle from his lips, and corking it quickly, thrusts it back in his pocket and heaves a shuddering sigh).*

ABEL. Aw, more! Just another swaller——

BUTLER. *(determinedly)* No!

ABEL. *(crying weakly)* Yuh dirty mutt!

BUTLER. *(quietly)* Don't get riled. It only makes you hotter—and thirstier. *(The boy sinks back exhausted and closes his eyes. BUTLER begins to talk in a more assured voice, as if the sip of water had renewed his courage)* That'll save us yet, that bit of water. A lucky notion of mine to think of it—at the last moment. They were just lowering the boats. I could hear you calling to me to hurry and come. But I thought of filling this bottle. It'd been lying there in the galley for two years

almost. I'd had it on my hip, full of whisky, that night in Oakland when I was shanghied. So I filled it out of a bucket before I ran to the boat. Lucky I did, son—for you and me—not for them—damn 'em! (*As if in self-justification*) Why should I tell 'em, eh? Did I ever get anything better than a kick or a curse from one of them? (*Vindictively*) Would they give it to me if they had it? They'd see me in hell first! And besides, it's too late for them. They're mad as hatters right now, the four of them. They ain't had a drop since three nights back, when the water in the cask gave out and we rowed up against this island in the dark. (*Suddenly he laughs queerly*) Didn't you hear them shouting and yelling like lunatics just before I came?

ABEL. I thought I heard something—on'y maybe I was dreamin'.

BUTLER. It's them that are doing the dreaming. I was with them. (*With rising anger*) He kicked me awake—and every time I tried to get away he beat me back. He's strong yet—(*with threatening vindictiveness*)—but he can't last long, damn him! (*Controlling himself, goes on with his story excitedly*) We went looking for water. Then Jimmy Kanaka saw a boat sunk half under down inside the reef—a Malay canoe, only bigger. They thought there might be something to drink on her. All of a sudden they gave an awful yell. They was all standing about a box they'd forced open, yelling and cursing and out of their heads completely. When I looked I seen the box was full of all sorts of metal junk—bracelets and bands and necklaces that I guess the Malays wear. Nothing but brass and copper, and bum imitations of diamonds and things—not worth a damn! I picked up some of the stuff to make sure. Then I told him

straight. "This ain't gold. It's brass and copper—not worth a damn." God, he got wild! I had to run, or he'd knifed me. (*With sudden violence*) It serves 'em right, all that's happened and going to happen. Me shanghied when I was drunk—taken away from a good job and forced to cook the swill on a rotten whaler! Oh, I'll pay him back for it! His damn ship is wrecked and lost to him—that's the first of it. I'll see him rot and die—and the three with him! But you and me'll be saved! D'you know why I've let you go halves on this water? It's because they kicked and beat you, too. And now we'll get even! (*He sinks back, exhausted by this outburst. They are both silent, leaning with closed eyes against the bole of the tree. A murmur of men's voices comes from the right, rear, and gradually gets nearer*).

ABEL. (*opening his eyes with a start*) Butts! I hear 'em comin'!

BUTLER. (*listening, wide-eyed, for a moment*) Yes, it's them. (*He gets up weakly. ABEL staggers to his feet. They both move to the left. BUTLER shades his eyes with his hands and looks toward the beach*) Look! They're dragging along that box of junk with 'em, the damn fools! (*Warningly*) They're crazy as hell. Don't give 'em no chance to pick on you, d'you hear? (*There is a scuffling of heavy footsteps in the sand, and CAPTAIN BARTLETT appears, followed by HORNE, who in turn is followed by CATES and JIMMY KANAKA. BARTLETT is a tall, huge-framed figure of a man, dressed in a blue double-breasted coat, pants of the same material, and rubber sea-boots turned down from the knees. In spite of the ravages of hunger and thirst there is still a suggestion of immense strength in his heavy-muscled body. His head is massive, thickly covered with tangled, iron-gray*

hair. His face is large, bony, and leather-tanned, with a long aquiline nose and a gash of a mouth shadowed by a bristling gray mustache. His broad jaw sticks out at an angle of implacable stubbornness. Bushy gray brows overhang the obsessed glare of his somber dark eyes. SILAS HORNE is a thin, parrot-nosed, angular old man, his lean face marked by a life-time of crass lusts and mean cruelty. He is dressed in gray cotton trousers, and a singlet torn open across his hairy chest. The exposed skin of his arms and shoulders and chest has been blistered and seared by the sun. A cap is on his head. CATES is squat and broad chested, with thick, stumpy legs and arms. His square, stupid face, with its greedy pig's eyes, is terribly pock-marked. He is gross and bestial, an unintelligent brute. He is dressed in dungaree pants and a dirty white sailor's blouse, and wears a brown cap. JIMMY KANAKA is a tall, sinewy, bronzed young Islander. He wears only a loin cloth and a leather belt with a sheath-knife. The last two are staggering beneath the weight of a heavy inlaid chest. The eyes of the three white men are wild. They pant exhaustedly, their legs trembling with weakness beneath them. Their lips are puffed and cracked, their voices muffled by their swollen tongues. But there is a mad air of happiness, of excitement, about their scorched faces).

BARTLETT. (in a crooning, monotonous voice) It's heavy, I know, heavy—that chest. Up, bullies! Up with her! (He flings himself in the shade, resting his back against the tree, and points to the sand at his feet). Put 'er there, bullies—there where I kin see!

HORNE. (echoing his words mechanically) Put 'er there!

CATES. (in thick, stupid tones) Aye-aye, sir! Down she goes, Jimmy. (They set the chest down).

BARTLETT. Sit down, lads, sit down. Ye've earned your spell of rest. (*The three men throw themselves on the sand in attitudes of spent weariness. BARTLETT's eyes are fixed gloatingly on the chest. There is a silence suddenly broken by CATES, who leaps to a kneeling position with a choked cry*).

CATES. (*his eyes staring at the Captain with fierce insistence*) I want a drink—water! (*The others are startled into a rigid, dazed attention. HORNE's lips move painfully in a soundless repetition of the word. There is a pause. Then BARTLETT strikes the sides of his head with his fist, as if to drive this obsession from his brain. BUTLER and ABEL stand looking at them with frightened eyes*).

BARTLETT. (*having regained control over himself, in a determined voice, deep-toned and menacing*) If ye speak that word again, Ben Cates—if ye say it once again—ye'll be food for the sharks! Ye hear?

CATES. (*terrified*) Yes, sir. (*He collapses limply on the sand again. HORNE and the KANAKA relax hopelessly*).

BARTLETT. (*with heavy scorn*) Are ye a child to take on like a sick woman—cryin' for what ye know we've not got? Can't ye stand up under a little thirst like a man? (*Resolutely*) There'll be water enough—if ye'll wait and keep a stiff upper lip on ye. We'll all be picked up today. I'll stake my word on it. This state o' things can't last. (*His eyes fall on the chest*) Ye ought to be singin' 'stead o' cryin'—after the find we've made. What's the lack of water amount to—when ye've gold before you? (*With mad exultation*) Gold! Enough of it is your share alone to buy ye rum, and wine, and women, too, for the rest o' your life!

CATES. (*straightening up to a sitting posture—his small eyes*

staring at the box fascinatedly—in a stupid mumble) Aye—aye—rum and wine!

BARTLETT. (*half closing his eyes as if the better to enjoy his vision*) Aye, rum and wine and women for you and Horne and Jimmy. No more hard work on the dirty sea for ye, bullies, but a full pay-day in your pockets to spend each day o' the year. (*The three strain their ears, listening eagerly. Even BUTLER and ABEL advance a step or two toward him, as if they, too, were half hypnotized*) And Cates grumbling because he's thirsty! I'd be the proper one to complain—if complainin' there was to do! Ain't I lost my ship and the work o' two years with her? And what have ye lost, all three, but a few rags o' clothes? (*With savage emphasis*) I tell ye, I be glad the Triton went down! (*He taps the box with his fingers*) They's more in this than ever was earned by all the whalin' ships afloat. They's gold—heavy and solid—and diamonds and emeralds and rubies!—red and green, they be.

CATES. (*licking his lips*) Aye, I seen 'em there—and emeralds be green, I know, and sell for a ton of gold!

BARTLETT. (*as if he hadn't heard and was dreaming out loud to himself*) Rum and wine for you three, and rest for me. Aye, I'll rest to home 'til the day I die. Aye, woman, I be comin' home now. Aye, Nat and Sue, your father be comin' home for the rest o' his life! I'll give up whalin' like ye've always been askin' me, Sarah. Aye, I'll go to meetin' with ye on a Sunday like ye've always prayed I would. We'll make the damn neighbors open their eyes, curse 'em! Carriages and silks for ye—they'll be nothin' too good—and for Sue and the boy. I've been dreamin' o' this for years. I never give a damn 'bout the oil—

that's just trade—but I always hoped on some voyage I'd pick up ambergris—a whole lot of it—and that's worth gold!

HORNE. (*his head bobbing up from his chest drowsily*) Aye, ambergris! It's costly truck.

BUTLER. (*in a whisper to the boy—cautiously*) There! Wasn't I right? Mad as hatters, all of 'em!

BARTLETT. (*his voice more and more that of a somnambulist*) It's time I settled down to home with ye, Sarah. They's plenty o' big trees on my place, bullies, and shade and green grass, and a cool wind off the sea. (*He shakes off the growing drowsiness and glares about him in a rage*) Hell's fire! What crazy truck be I thinkin' of? (*But he and the others sink back immediately into stupor. After a pause he begins to relate a tale in a droning voice*) Years ago, when I was whalin' out o' New Bedford, a man come to me—Spanish-looking, he was—and wanted to charter my ship and me go shares. He showed me a map o' some island off the coast of South America somewhere. They was a cross marked on it where treasure had been buried by the old pirates. But I was a fool. I didn't believe him. He got old Scott's schooner—finally. She sailed and never was heard o' since. But I've never forgot him and his map. And often I've thought if I'd 'a' went that vige—(*He straightens up and shouts with aggressive violence*) But here she be! Run right into it—without no map nor nothin'. Gold and diamonds and all—there they be in front o' our eyes! (*To the now alert JIMMY*) Open 'er up, Jimmy!

JIMMY. (*getting up—in his soft voice*) Aye, Captain. (*He reaches down to lift the lid*).

BARTLETT. (*a sudden change of feeling comes over him, and he knocks JIMMY's arm aside savagely*) Hands off, ye dog! I'm

takin' care o' this chest, and no man's hand's goin' to touch it but mine!

JIMMY. (*stepping back docilely—in the same unmoved, soft tone*) Aye, Captain. (*He squats down to the left of the chest*).

BARTLETT. (*seeming suddenly to notice the cook for the first time*) So there you be, eh? (*His voice growing thick with rage*) I ain't forgot what ye said down by the shore there! Lucky for ye I didn't catch ye then! "Brass and copper—junk," ye said—"not gold! Not worth a damn," ye said! Ye blasted son o' a liar! (*Looking at ABEL*) Ye've been tellin' that boy your lies too, I kin tell by the look o' him. (*Sternly*) Come here, boy!

ABEL. (*advances with faltering steps*) Y-yes, s-sir?

BARTLETT. Open up that chest! Open it up, ye brat! (*With a desperate movement of fear ABEL reaches down and flings open the lid of the chest. As he does so, BARTLETT's huge hand fastens on the collar of his coat, and holds him with face bent over the box. HORNE, CATES, and JIMMY KANAKA pull themselves close, their necks craning for a look inside.*

BARTLETT. (*shaking the terror-stricken boy*) What d'ye see there, ye little swab? What d'ye see there?

ABEL. Aw—leggo—I'm chokin'!

BARTLETT. (*grimly*) Ye'll choke in earnest if ye don't answer me. What d'ye see? Is it gold? Answer me—is it gold?

ABEL. (*stutteringly*) Yes—sure—gold—I see it!

BARTLETT. (*thrusters him away. The boy staggers and falls to the sand. BARTLETT turns to BUTLER triumphantly*) Ye see, ye liar? Gold! Gold! Even a child can tell it at a look.

(*With a somber menace in his tone*) But ye—don't believe—do ye?

BUTLER. (*frightenedly*) Maybe I was wrong, sir. I—didn't—look very careful.

BARTLETT. Come here! (*He stands up, his back against the tree*) Come here!

BUTLER. Yes, sir. (*But he looks about him shiftily, as if to run away*).

BARTLETT. Jimmy! (*The KANAKA leaps to his feet*) Knife him, Jimmy, if he tries to run.

JIMMY. (*his hand goes to his knife, his dark eyes lighting up with savagery—in his soft voice*) Aye, Captain!

BARTLETT. (*to the trembling cook*) Come here!

BUTLER. (*goes to him with the courage of desperation*) Yes, sir.

BARTLETT. (*pointing to the contents of the chest*) Is it gold—or no?

BUTLER. If I can feel of one——

BARTLETT. Pick one up.

BUTLER. (*picks up a heavy anklet encrusted with colored glass, looks at it for a minute—then feigning great assurance*) I was wrong, Captain. It's gold all right enough—worth all kinds of money, I bet.

BARTLETT. (*with mad triumph.*) Ha! Ye've come to your senses, have ye? Too late, ye swab! No share for ye! And here's to teach ye for lyin' to me before! (*His fist jerks out from his side, and BUTLER is knocked sprawling on the sand, where he lies groaning for a moment, the anklet still clutched in his hand. The boy gives a gasp of fright and scampers off, left.*)

BARTLETT. That'll learn ye! (*He sits down beside the chest. The others crouch close. BARTLETT shoves in both of his hands—in a tone of mad gloating*) Gold! Better'n whaling, ain't she, boys? Better'n ambergris, even if I ever had luck to find any! (*BUTLER staggers to his feet. He examines the anklet with contemptuous scorn and even bites it to make sure. Then he edges stealthily toward the left. A sudden transformation comes over his face and he glowers at the Captain with hatred, his features distorted with fury*).

JIMMY KANAKA. (*pointing to BUTLER*) He got him, Captain!

BARTLETT. (*glancing at the cook with contemptuous scorn*) Sneakin' away with that piece o' the gold, be ye? Ye thievin' swine! Ye know right enough it's gold now, don't ye? Well, ye kin keep it—for your share for speakin' the truth that once.

HORNE. (*his cupidity protesting*) Don't give it to him, sir! It's so much the less for us that worked for it when he did nothin'!

BUTLER. (*overcome by hysterical rage—stammering*) Who asked you for it—eh? Who—wants the dam thing? Not me! No! (*Holding the anklet out contemptuously*) Gold? Ha-ha! Gold? Brass, that's what—and pieces of glass! Junk! Not worth a dam. Here! Take it! (*He flings it on the sand before them. BARTLETT snatches it up protectingly*).

BARTLETT. (*in a frenzy*) Jimmy! (*But BUTLER runs off left with a terrified cry. JIMMY springs to his feet and stands with his hand on his knife, waiting for a further order*).

JIMMY. (*eagerly*) I go catch—go stick him, Captain?

BARTLETT. (*pausing—with a frown*) No. They's time enough for that—if need be. Sit down. (*JIMMY sits down again with a childish air of sulking. BARTLETT stares at the*

treasure, continuing to frown, as if BUTLER's action had made him uneasy, bewildered and confused him. He mutters half to himself) Queer! Queer! He threw it back as if 'twas a chunk of mud! He knew—and yet he said he didn't want it. Junk, he called it—and he knows it's gold! He said 'twas gold himself a second back. He's queer. Why would he say junk when he knows it's gold? D'ye think—he don't believe?

HORNE. He was mad because you knocked him down.

BARTLETT. (*shaking his head grimly*) It ain't the first time I've knocked him down; but he never spoke up to me—like that—before. No, it's somethin' else is wrong with him—somethin'.

HORNE. No share for him, you told him, sir. That's what's wrong with him.

BARTLETT. (*again shaking his head*) No. His eyes—— It's somethin' he's got in his head—somethin' he's hidin'! His share—maybe he thinks he'll get his share anyway, in spite o' us! Maybe he thinks his share wouldn't be all he wants! Maybe he thinks we'll die o' hunger and thirst before we get picked up—and he'll live—and then—he'll come in for the whole chestful! (*Suddenly springing to his feet in a rage*) Hell's fire! That's it, bullies! That's his sneakin' plan! To watch us die—and steal it from us!

CATES. (*rising to his knees and shaking his hand threateningly above his head*) Tell Jimmy to knife him, sir! Tell Jimmy—I ain't got a knife, or I'd do it myself. (*He totters weakly to his feet*).

JIMMY. (*eagerly*) You speak, I stick him, Captain. I stick boy, too.

CATES. (*weakening*) I'm weak, but I kin do for him yet. I'm

weak—— (*His knees sag under him. He pleads piteously*) If I'd only a drink to put some strength in me! If I'd only a sup o' water, I'd do for him! (*Turning, as if to stagger down toward the beach*) There must be water. Let's look again. I'll go look—— (*But the effort he makes is too much for his strength and he falls to the sand, panting with open mouth*).

BARTLETT. (*summoning his will—sternly*) Put a clapper on that jaw of yours, Cates, or I'll do it for ye!

CATES. (*blubbing*) If we don't find water—he'll watch us die.

JIMMY. (*insinuatingly*) Better me knife cook fella—kill boy, too!

BARTLETT. Will killin' 'em give us drink, ye fools? (*After a pause, he shakes his head as if to drive off some thought, and mutters*) No more o' that! (*Suddenly, in a tone of sharp command*) No more o' that, I say! We're keepin' no right watch for ships. Go aloft on that tree, Jimmy—and damn quick! (*KANAKA climbs quickly up the bole of the coco palm to the top and looks out on all sides of him. The others rise painfully to their feet and gaze up at him with awakened hope*).

JIMMY. (*suddenly, in a glad voice*) I see um—see sail, Captain.

CATES. (*waving his arms frenziedly*) Sail—ho!

JIMMY. Look plenty like trade schooner, Captain. She no change course she fetch plenty close by here. She make full sail, she got plenty fella wind out there, she come quick.

HORNE. (*clapping CATES on the back*) Headin' straight for us, Cates, d'you hear?

BARTLETT. Come down. (*The Islander slides down. BARTLETT exclaims exultantly*) Didn't I tell ye? In the nick o'

time. When she makes in close we'll go down to the reef and yell and wave at her. They'll see! The luck's with us today! (*His eyes fall on the treasure and he starts*) But now—what's to do with this chest—the gold?

HORNE. (*quickly*) You ain't going to tell them on the schooner about it?

CATES. They'd claim to share with us.

BARTLETT. (*scornfully*) D'ye think I'm cracked? No, we'll bury it here.

CATES. (*regretfully*) Leave it behind for anyone to find?

BARTLETT. We'll bury it deep, where hell itself won't find it—and we'll make a map o' this island. (*He takes a piece of paper and a stub of pencil from his pocket—pointing to the foot of the tree*) Dig a hole here—you, Horne and Jimmy—and dig it deep. (*The two bend down and commence to hollow out the sand with their hands. BARTLETT draws on the paper*) There's the lagoon—and the reef— (*To CATES, who is peering over his shoulder*) And here where the tree is, d'ye see, Cates, I'll make a cross where the gold is hid. (*Exultantly*) Oh, all hell'd not stop me from findin' this place again! Let us once get home and I'll fit out a small schooner the four of us can sail, and we'll come back here to dig it up. It won't be long, I swear to ye!

HORNE. (*straightening up*) This deep enough, sir?

JIMMY. (*who has straightened up and is looking off left—suddenly points excitedly*) He look, Captain! Cook fella, he look here! Boy he look, too! They look plenty too much, Captain! (*All four stand staring off at BUTLER and the boy, whose presence on the island they have forgotten in their mad excitement*).

CATES. (*in stupid dismay*) They'll know where it's hid, sir!

HORNE. They'll tell 'em on the schooner!

CATES. (*wildly*) We've got to do for 'em, Captain! Gimme your knife, Jimmy—your knife—— (*He stumbles toward the Islander, who pushes him aside brusquely, looking questioningly toward the Captain*).

BARTLETT. (*who has been standing motionless, as if stunned by this forgotten complication—slowly*) There they be watchin' us, the sneakin' dogs! I was forgettin' they was here. (*Striking his knee with clenched fist*) We've got to do somethin' damn quick! That schooner'll be up soon where they kin sight her—and they'll wave and yell then—and she'll see 'em!

HORNE. And good-by to the gold for us!

JIMMY. (*eagerly*) You say fella word, Captain, me kill um quick. They no make plenty cry for schooner! They keep dam still plenty too much!

BARTLETT. (*looking at the Islander with mad cunning but replying only to HORNE*) Aye, it's good-by to the gold, Horne. That scum of a cook—he's made a mock o' us—sayin' it wasn't gold when he knew it was—he'll tell 'em—he'll get joy o' tellin' 'em!

HORNE. And that scrub of a boy—he's no better. He'll be in with him neck and crop.

CATES. (*hoarsely*) Knife 'em—and be done with it—I say!

BARTLETT. Or, if they don't tell the schooner's skipper it'll only be because they're plannin' to come back themselves—before we kin—and dig it up. That cook—there's somethin' queer in his mind—somethin' he was hidin'—pretendin' not to believe. What d'ye think, Horne?

HORNE. I think—time's gettin' short—and talkin' won't do

no good. (*Insinuatingly*) They'd do for us soon enough if *they* was able.

BARTLETT. Aye, murder was plain in his eyes when he looked at me.

HORNE. (*lowering his voice to a whisper*) Tell Jimmy—Captain Bartlett—is what I say!

BARTLETT. It's agin the law, Silas Horne!

HORNE. The law don't reach to this island.

BARTLETT. (*monotonously*) It's agin the law a captain's sworn to keep wherever he sails. They ain't refused duty—nor mutinied.

HORNE. Who'll know they ain't? They're trying to steal what's yours—that's worse'n mutiny. (*As a final persuasion*) And Jimmy's a heathen and under no laws. And he's stronger'n you are. You couldn't stop 'im.

BARTLETT. Aye—I couldn't prevent——

JIMMY. (*eagerly*) I fix um, Captain, they no tell! (BARTLETT *doesn't answer, but stares at the treasure.* HORNE *makes violent motions to JIMMY to go. The Islander stares at his master's face. Then, seeming to read the direct command there, he grunts with satisfaction, and pulling his knife from its sheath, he goes stealthily off left. CATES raises himself on his haunches to watch the Islander's movements. HORNE and BARTLETT sit still in a strained immobility, their eyes on the chest.*)

CATES. (*in an excited whisper*) I see 'em! They're sittin' with their backs this way! (*A slight pause*) There's Jimmy. He's crawlin' on his hands behind 'em. They don't notice—he's right behind—almost atop o' them. (*A pause. CATES gives a fiendish grunt*) Ugh! (BUTLER'S *muffled cry comes from the left*) Right in the middle of the back! The cook's done! The

boy's runnin'! (*There is a succession of quick screams from the boy, the padding of feet running toward them, the fall of a body, and the boy's dying groan*).

HORNE. (*with satisfaction*) It's done, sir!

BARTLETT. (*slowly*) I spoke no word, remember that, Silas Horne!

HORNE. (*cunningly*) Nor me neither, sir. Jimmy took it on himself. If blame there is—it's on him.

BARTLETT. (*gloomily*) I spoke no word! (*JIMMY returns noiselessly from the left*).

JIMMY. (*grinning with savage pride*) I fix um fella plenty, Captain. They no tell. They no open mouth plenty too much!

CATES. (*maudlinly*) You're a man, Jimmy—a man with guts to him—even if you're a—— (*He babbles incoherently*).

JIMMY. (*as the Captain does not look at him*) I go climb fella tree, Captain? I make look for schooner?

BARTLETT. (*rousing himself with an effort*) Aye. (*The Islander climbs the tree*).

HORNE. (*getting to his feet—eagerly*) Where away, Jimmy?

JIMMY. She come, Captain, she come plenty quick.

HORNE. (*looking in the direction JIMMY indicates*) I kin see her tops'ls from here, sir. Look!

BARTLETT. (*getting to his feet—stares out to sea*) Aye! There she be—and makin' towards us fast. (*In a flash his somber preoccupation is gone, and he is commander once more. He puts the anklet in his hand into his coat pocket—harshly*) Come down out o' that! They's work to do. (*JIMMY clambers down*) Did ye leave—them—lyin' in plain sight on the open sand?

JIMMY. Yes. I no touch um, Captain.

BARTLETT. Then ye'll touch 'em now. Go, bury 'em, cover 'em up with sand. And mind ye make a good job o' it that none'll see. Jump now!

JIMMY. (*obediently*) I go, Captain. (*He hurries off left*).

BARTLETT. Down to the reef with ye, Horne! (*Giving the prostrate CATES a kick*) Up out o' that, Cates! Go with Horne, and when ye see the schooner hull up, wave to 'em, and yell like mad, d'ye hear?

HORNE. Aye, aye, sir!

BARTLETT. I'll stay here and bury the gold. It's best to be quick about it! They may turn a spyglass on us when they raise the island from deck! Off with ye! (*He gives CATES another kick*).

CATES. (*groaning*) I'm sick! (*Incoherently*) Can't—report for duty—this watch. (*With a shout*) Water!

BARTLETT. (*contemptuously*) Ye dog! Give him a hand, Horne.

HORNE. (*putting a hand under his shoulder*) Up, man! We're to signal the schooner. There'll be water on board o' her—barrels of it!

CATES. (*aroused, scrambles to his feet, violently shaking off HORNE's hand*) Water aboard o' her! (*His staring eyes catch the schooner's sails on the horizon. He breaks into a staggering run and disappears down toward the beach, right rear, waving his arms wildly and shouting*) Ahoy! Ahoy! Water! (*HORNE walks out quickly after him*).

BARTLETT. (*after a quick glance around, sinks on his knees beside the chest and shoves both hands into it. From the chest comes a metallic clink as he fingers the pieces in his hands*

gloatingly) Ye're safe now! (*In a dreaming tone, his eyes fixed before him in an ecstatic vision*) No more whalin' on the dirty seas! Rest to home! Gold! I've been dreamin' o' it all my life! (*Shaking himself—savagely*) Ye fool! Losin' your senses, be ye? Time ye was picked up! Lucky! (*He shoves down the lid and places the chest in the hole. He pushes the sand in on top of it, whispering hoarsely*) Lay safe, d'ye hear. For I'll be back for ye! Aye—in spite of hell I'll dig ye up again! (*The voices of HORNE and JIMMY can be heard from the distance shouting as*

(The Curtain Falls)

ACT TWO

SCENE. *Interior of an old boat-shed on the wharf of the Bartlett place on the California coast. In the rear, a double doorway looking out over the end of the wharf to the bay with the open sea beyond. On the left, two windows, and another door, opening on the dock. Near this door, a cot with blankets and a pillow without a slip. In the center, front, a table with a bottle and glasses on it, and three cane-bottomed chairs. On the right, a fishing dory. Here and there about the shed all sorts of odds and ends pertaining to a ship—old anchors, ropes, tackle, paint-pots, old spars, etc.*

It is late afternoon of a day six months later. Sunlight filters feebly through the stained, cobwebby window panes.

As the curtain rises, BARTLETT and SILAS HORNE are discovered. HORNE is in working clothes of paint-stained dungaree. If his sufferings on the island have left any marks on his dry wizened face, they are undiscoverable. In BARTLETT, however, the evidence is marked. His hair has turned white. There are deep hollows under his cheek-bones. His jaw and tight-lipped mouth express defiant determination, as if he were fighting back some weakness inside himself, a weakness found in his eyes, which have something in them of fear, of a wishing to avoid other eyes. He is dressed much the same as when on the island. He sits by the table, center, his abstracted gaze bent on the floor before him.

HORNE. *(who is evidently waiting for the Captain to say something—after a pause, glancing at him uneasily)* I'd best

be gettin' back aboard the schooner, sir. (*Receiving no answer he starts for the door on the left*).

BARTLETT. (*rousing himself with an effort*) Wait. (*After a pause*) The full tide's at dawn tomorrow. They know we'll be sailin' then, don't they—Cates and Jimmy?

HORNE. Yes, sir. Oh, they'll be glad o' the word—and me, too, sir. (*With a greedy grin*) It's all we've been talkin' of since ye brought us down here—diggin' up the gold!

BARTLETT. (*passionately*) Aye, the gold! We'll have it before long, now, I reckon. That schooner—the way we've fitted her up—she'd take a man safe to the Pole and back! We'll drop anchor here with the chest on board in six months, unless—— (*Hesitates*).

HORNE. (*uneasily*) What, sir?

BARTLETT. (*brusquely*) The weather, ye fool!

HORNE. We'll trust to luck for that. (*Glancing at the Captain curiously*) And speakin' o' luck, sir—the schooner ain't been christened yet.

BARTLETT. (*betraying a sudden, fierce determination*) She will be!

HORNE. There'd be no luck for a ship sailin' out without a name.

BARTLETT. She'll have a name, I tell ye! She'll be named the Sarah Allen, and Sarah'll christen her herself.

HORNE. It oughter been done, by rights, when we launched her a month back.

BARTLETT. (*sternly*) I know that as well as ye. (*After a pause*) She wasn't willin' to do it then. Women has queer notions—when they're sick, like. (*Defiantly—as if he were ad-*

dressing someone outside of the room) But Sarah'll be willin' now!

HORNE. Yes, sir. (*He again turns to go, as if he were anxious to get away*).

BARTLETT. Wait! There's somethin' else I want to ask ye. Nat, he's been hangin' round the schooner all his spare time o' late. (*With rising anger*) I hope ye've remembered what I ordered ye, all three. Not a word o' it to him!

HORNE. (*retreating a step—hastily*) No fear o' that, sir!

BARTLETT. It ain't that I'm afeerd to tell him o' the gold, Silas Horne. (*Slowly*) It's them—other things—I'd keep him clear of.

HORNE. (*immediately guessing what he means—reassuringly*) We was all out o' our heads when them things happened, sir.

BARTLETT. Mad? Aye! But I ain't forgot—them two. (*He represses a shudder—then goes on slowly*) Do they ever come back to you—when you're asleep, I mean?

HORNE. (*pretending mystification*) Who's that, sir?

BARTLETT. (*with somber emphasis*) That cook and that boy. They come to me. I'm gettin' to be afeered o' goin' to sleep—not 'feered o' them, I don't mean. (*With sudden defiant bravado*) Not all the ghosts out o' hell kin keep me from a thing I've set my mind on. (*Collecting himself*) But I've waked up talkin' out loud—and I'm afeerd there might be some-one hear me.

HORNE. (*uneasily—with an attempt to be reassuring*) You ain't all cured o' that sun and thirst on the island yet, sir.

BARTLETT. (*evidently reassured—with an attempt at conviviality*) Sit down a bit, Horne, and take a grog. (HORNE

does so. BARTLETT *pours out a half-tumbler full of rum for himself and shoves the bottle over to HORNE*).

HORNE. Luck to our vige, sir.

BARTLETT. Aye, luck! (*They drink. BARTLETT leans over and taps HORNE on the arm*) Aye, it takes time to get cured o' thirst and sun! (*Somberly—after a pause*) I spoke no word, Silas Horne, d'ye remember?

HORNE. Nor me. Jimmy did it alone. (*Craftily*) We'd all three swear Bible oaths to that in any court. And even if ye'd given the word, there ain't no good thinkin' more o' it, sir. Didn't they deserve all they got? Wasn't they plottin' on the sly to steal the gold?

BARTLETT. (*his eyes gleaming*) Aye!

HORNE. And when you said he'd get no share of it, didn't he lie to your face that it wasn't gold?

BARTLETT. (*with sudden rage*) Aye, brass and junk, he said, the lyin' scum! That's what he keeps sayin' when I see him in sleep! He didn't believe—an' then he owned up himself 'twas gold! He knew! He lied a-purpose! (*Rising to his feet—with confident defiance*) They deserved no better nor they got. Let 'em rot! (*Pours out another drink for himself and HORNE*).

HORNE. Luck, sir! (*They drink. There is a knock at the door on the left followed by MRS. BARTLETT's voice calling feebly, "ISAIAH! ISAIAH!" BARTLETT starts but makes no answer. HORNE turns to him questioningly*) It's Mrs. Bartlett, sir. Shall I open the door?

BARTLETT. No. I ain't aimin' to see her—yet awhile. (*Then with sudden reasonless rage*) Let her in, damn ye! (*HORNE goes and unhooks the door. MRS. BARTLETT enters. She is a*

slight, slender little woman of fifty. Sickness, or the inroads of a premature old age, have bowed her shoulders, whitened her hair, and forced her to walk feebly with the aid of a cane. A resolute spirit still flashes from her eyes, however, and there is a look of fixed determination on her face. She stands gazing at her husband. There is something accusing in her stare).

BARTLETT. (*avoiding her eyes—brusquely*) Well? What is it ye want o' me, Sarah?

MRS. B. I want to speak with you alone, Isaiah.

HORNE. I'll be gettin' back aboard, sir. (*Starts to go*).

BARTLETT. (*in a tone almost of fear*) Wait. I'm goin' with ye. (*Turning to his wife—with a certain rough tenderness*) Ye oughtn't to walk down the hill here, Sarah. The doctor told ye to rest in the house and save your strength.

MRS. B. I want to speak to you alone, Isaiah.

BARTLETT. (*very uneasily*) I've got to work on the schooner, Sarah.

MRS. B. She'll be sailin' soon?

BARTLETT. (*suddenly turning on her defiantly*) Tomorrow at dawn!

MRS. B. (*with her eyes fixed accusingly on his*) And you be goin' with her?

BARTLETT. (*in the same defiant tone*) Yes, I be! Who else'd captain her?

MRS. B. On a craft without a name.

BARTLETT. She'll have that name!

MRS. B. No.

BARTLETT. She'll have that name, I tell ye!

MRS. B. No.

BARTLETT. (*thoroughly aroused, his will tries to break hers,*

but finds her unbending. He mutters menacingly) Ye'll see! We'll talk o' that later, you and me. *(Without a further glance at his wife he strides past her and disappears through the doorway, followed by HORNE. MRS. BARTLETT sinks down in the chair by the table. She appears suddenly weak and crushed. Then from outside comes a girl's laughing voice. MRS. BARTLETT does not seem to hear, nor to notice SUE and DREW when they enter. SUE is a slender, pretty girl of about twenty, with large blue eyes, reddish-brown hair, and a healthy, sun-tanned, out-of-door complexion. In spite of the slightness of her figure there is a suggestion of great vitality and nervous strength about her. DREW is a well-set-up, tall young fellow of thirty. Not in any way handsome, his boyish face, tanned to a deep brown, possesses an engaging character of healthy, cheerful forcefulness that has its compelling charm. There would be no chance of mistaking him for anything but the ship's officer he is. It is written on his face, his walk, his voice, his whole bearing).*

SUE. *(as they enter)* He'll either be here or on the schooner, Danny. *(Then she sees her mother, with startled amazement)* Ma! Good heavens, what are you doing here? Don't you know you shouldn't——

MRS. B. *(with a start—turning to her daughter with a forced smile)* There, Sue, now! Don't go scoldin' me. *(Then seeing DREW—in a tone of forced gayety)* And if there ain't Danny Drew—back home to port at last! You can kiss an old woman, Danny—without makin' her jealous, I reckon.

DREW. *(kissing her—with a smile)* It certainly seems good to see you again—and be back again myself.

MRS. B. We read in the paper where your ship'd reached San Francisco. Sue's been on pins and needles ever since.

SUE. (*protestingly*) Ma!

DREW. (*with a grin*) It's a long time to be away from Sue—four months. You remember, Ma, I left just after the big excitement here—when Captain Bartlett turned up after we'd all heard the Triton was wrecked and given him up for lost.

MRS. B. (*her face clouding—in a tone of deep sorrow*) Yes. (*DREW is surprised and glances at SUE questioningly. She sighs.*)
MRS. BARTLETT gets to her feet with difficulty, assisted by DREW.

SUE. We'll help you back to the house.

MRS. B. Shucks! I'm sick o' the house. I need sun and fresh air, and today's so nice I couldn't stay indoors. I'm goin' to set out on the wharf and watch your Pa workin' on the schooner. Ain't much time left to see her, Sue. They're sailin' tomorrow at dawn, your Pa says.

SUE. Tomorrow? Then—you're going to christen her?

MRS. B. (*with grim determination*) No, I ain't, Sue! (*Catching DREW's glance fixed on her with puzzled curiosity, she immediately attempts to resume her joking tone*) Shucks! Here's Danny wonderin' what silliness we're talkin' of. It's just this, Danny. Captain Bartlett, he's got a crazy notion in his head that just because his ship was wrecked last vige he'll give up whalin' for life. He's fitted out this little schooner for tradin' in the Islands. More money in that, he says. But I don't agree with no such lunatic notions, and I'm not goin' to set my approval on his craziness by christenin' his ship with my name, like he wants me to. He'd ought to stick to whalin', like he's done all his life. Don't you think so, Danny?

DREW. (*embarrassed*) Why, sure—he's rated one of the smartest whaling skippers here on the coast—and I should think——

MRS. B. Just what I tell him—only he's that stubborn. I'd best get out quick while it's still sunny and warm. It's damp in here for an old body. (*DREW helps her to the door on the left, opens it, and the two go out, followed by SUE, who carries a chair. After a pause, SUE and DREW return. SUE carefully shuts the door after them. Her face is troubled*).

DREW. (*looks at her for a minute, then comes and puts his arm around her and kisses her*) What's the trouble, Sue?

SUE. (*trying to force a smile*) Nothing, Danny.

DREW. Oh, yes there is! No use putting me off that way. Why, I've felt it hanging about in the air ever since I looked at your Ma.

SUE. Yes, she's failed terribly since you saw her last.

DREW. Oh, I don't mean just sickness—only—did you notice how she had to—force herself—to joke about things? She used to be so cheerful natural. (*Scratching his head in honest puzzlement*) But—that ain't what I mean, either. What is it, Sue? Maybe I can help somehow. You look worried, too. Pshaw! You can tell me, can't you?

SUE. Why, yes, Danny—of course—only I'm just as puzzled as you over what it comes from. It's something between Pa and Ma—something only the two of them know. It all seemed to start one morning after you'd left—about a week after he'd come home with those three awful men. During that first week he acted all right—just like he used to—only he'd get talking kind of wild now and then about being glad the Triton was lost, and promising we'd all be millionaires once he started making trips on the schooner. Ma didn't seem to mind his going in for trading then. Then, the night of the day he bought the schooner, something must have happened between them.

Neither of them came down to breakfast. I went up to Ma, and found her so sick we sent for the doctor. He said she'd suffered a great shock of some kind, although she wouldn't tell him a word. I found Pa down in this shed. He'd moved that cot down here, and said he'd have to sleep here after that because he wanted to be near the schooner. It's been that way ever since. He's slept down here and never come up to the house except at mealtimes. He's never been alone with Ma one second since then, I don't believe. And she—she's been trying to corner him, to get him alone. I've noticed it, although she does her best to hide it from Nat and me. And she's been failing, growing weaker and sicker looking every day. (*Breaking down*) Oh, Danny, these last months have been terrible!

DREW. (*soothing her*) There! It'll all come out right.

SUE. I'm sure that's why she's crept down here today. She's bound she'll see him alone.

DREW. (*frowning*) Seems to me it must be all your Pa's fault, Sue—whatever it is. Have you tried to talk to him?

SUE. Yes—a good many times; but all he's ever said was: "There's things you wouldn't take interest in, Sue. You'll know when it's time to know"—and then he'd break off by asking me what I'd like most to have in the world if he had piles of money. And then, one time, he seemed to be terribly afraid of something, and he said to me: "You hustle up and marry Danny, Sue. You marry him and get out of this."

DREW. (*with an affectionate grin*) I surely wish you'd take his advice, Sue! (*He kisses her*).

SUE. (*with intense longing*) Oh, I wish I could, Danny.

DREW. I've quite considerable saved now, Sue, and it won't be so long before I get my own ship, I'm hoping, now that I've

got my master's certificate. I was hoping at the end of this voyage——

SUE. So was I, Danny—but it can't be this time. With Ma so weak, and no one to take care of her but me—— (*Shaking her head—in a tone of decision*) I couldn't leave home now, Danny. It wouldn't be right. I couldn't feel really happy—until this thing—whatever it is—is settled between Pa and Ma and they're just as they used to be again. (*Pleadingly*) You understand, don't you, Danny?

DREW. (*soberly*) Why—surely I do, Sue. (*He pats her hand*) Only, it's hard waiting. (*He sighs*).

SUE. I know. It's just as hard for me.

DREW. I thought maybe I could help; but this isn't anything anyone outside your family could mix in. (*SUE shakes her head. He goes on gloomily after a pause*) What's the matter with Nat? Seems as if he ought to be able to step in and talk turkey to your Pa.

SUE. (*slowly*) You'll find Nat changed, too, Danny—changed terribly. He's caught the disease—whatever it is. You know how interested in his work he's been ever since they put him in the designing department down in the shipyard?

DREW. Yes.

SUE. (*with emphasis*) Well, all that's changed. He hates it now, or at least he says he does. And when he comes home, he spends all his time prowling around the dock here, talking with those three awful men. And what do you think he told me only the other day? That he was bound he'd throw up his job and make this voyage on the schooner. He even asked me to ask Pa to let him go.

DREW. Your Pa don't want him to, eh?

SUE. Why, of course not! Leave a fine position he worked so hard to get just for this crazy notion! The terrible part is, he's got Ma worried to death—as if she wasn't upset enough already. She's so afraid he'll go—that Pa'll let him at the last moment.

DREW. Maybe I can help after all. I can talk to Nat.

SUE. (*shaking her head*) He's not the same Nat, Danny.

DREW. (*trying to be consoling*) Pshaw, Sue! I think you just get to imagining things. (*As he finishes speaking, the door in the rear opens and NAT appears. He is a tall, loose-framed boy of eighteen, who bears a striking resemblance to his father. His face, like his father's, is large and bony, with deepset black eyes, an aquiline nose, and a wide, thin-lipped mouth. There is no suggestion in NAT, however, of the older man's physical health and great strength. He appears an indoor product, undeveloped in muscle, with a sallow complexion and stooped shoulders. His thick hair is a deep black. His voice recalls his father's, hollow and penetrating. He is dressed in a gray flannel shirt and corduroy trousers. DREW calls out to him heartily*) Hello, Nat! Speak of the Devil! Sue and I were just talking about you. (*He goes toward NAT, his hand outstretched*).

NAT. (*comes toward them, meets DREW, and shakes his hand with evident pleasure*) Hello, Danny! You're a sight for sore eyes! (*His manner undergoes a sudden change. He casts a quick, suspicious glance from DREW to his sister*) You were talking about me? What about?

SUE. (*quickly—with a warning glance at DREW*) About your work down at the shipyard.

NAT. (*disgustedly*) Oh, that. (*In a tone of reasonless irritation*) For God's sake, Sue, let me alone about my work.

Don't I have to live with the damn thing all day, without your shoving it in my face the minute I get home? I want to forget it—get away!

DREW. Go to sea, eh?

NAT. (*suspiciously*) Maybe. Why? What do you mean? (*Turning to his sister—angrily*) What have you been telling Danny?

SUE. I was talking about the schooner—telling him she sails tomorrow.

NAT. (*dumfounded*) Tomorrow? (*Overcome by sudden, nervous excitement*) It can't be. How do you know? Who told you?

SUE. Ma. Pa told her.

NAT. Then she's been talking to him—telling him not to take me, I'll bet. (*Angrily*) Oh, I wish Ma'd mind her own business!

SUE. Nat!

NAT. Well, Sue, how would you like it? I'm not a little boy any more. I know what I want to do. I want to go with them. I want to go more than I've ever wanted anything else in my life before. He—he doesn't want me. He's afraid I—— But I think I can force him to—— (*He glances at DREW's amazed face and stops abruptly—sullenly*) Where is Pa?

SUE. He's aboard the schooner.

NAT. (*disappointedly*) Then it's no good trying to see him now.

DREW. Sound's funny to hear you talking about going to sea. Why, you always used——

NAT. This is different.

DREW. You want to see the Islands, I suppose?

NAT. (*suspiciously*) Maybe. Why not?

DREW. What group is your Pa heading for first?

NAT. (*more suspiciously*) You'll have to ask him. Why do you want to know? (*Abruptly*) You better be getting up to the house, Sue—if we're to have any supper. Danny must be hungry. (*He turns his back on them. They exchange meaning glances*).

SUE. (*with a sigh*) It must be getting late. Come on, Danny. You can see Pa later on. (*They go toward the door in the rear*) Aren't you coming, Nat?

NAT. No. I'll wait. (*Impatiently*) Go ahead. I'll be up before long.

DREW. See you later, then, Nat.

NAT. Yes. (*They go out, rear. NAT paces up and down in a great state of excitement. The door on the left is opened and BARTLETT enters. Father and son stand looking at one another for a second. NAT takes a step backward as if in fear, then straightens up defiantly*).

BARTLETT. (*slowly*) Is this the way ye mind my orders, boy? I've told ye time an' again not to be sneakin' and spyin' around this wharf.

NAT. I'm not sneaking and spying. I wanted to talk to you, Pa.

BARTLETT. (*sits down by the table*) Well, here I be.

NAT. Sue said the schooner sails tomorrow.

BARTLETT. Aye!

NAT. (*resolutely*) I want to go with you, Pa.

BARTLETT. (*briefly—as if dismissing the matter*) Ye can't. I've told ye that before. Let this be the last time ye ask it.

NAT. But why? Why can't I go?

BARTLETT. Ye've your own work to do—good work. Attend to that and leave me to mine.

NAT. But you always wanted me to go on voyages to learn whaling with you.

BARTLETT. This be different.

NAT. (*with excited indignation*) Yes, this is different! Don't I know it? Do you think you can hide that from me? It is different, and that's why I want to go.

BARTLETT. Ye can't, I say.

NAT. (*pleadingly*) But why not, Pa? I can do a man's work on a ship, or anywhere else.

BARTLETT. (*roughly*) Your place is here, with Sue and your Ma, and here you'll stay.

NAT. (*angrily*) That isn't any reason. But I know your real one. You're afraid——

BARTLETT. (*with a touch of uneasiness—forcing a scornful laugh*) Afeerd! Afeerd o' what? Did ye ever know me to be afeerd?

NAT. Afraid of what I might find out if I went with you.

BARTLETT. (*with the same forced, uneasy scorn*) And what d'ye think ye'd find out, Nat?

NAT. First of all that it's not a trading venture you're going on. Oh, I'm not a fool! That story is all right to fool the neighbors and girls like Sue. But I know better.

BARTLETT. What d'ye know?

NAT. You're going for something else.

BARTLETT. What would that be?

NAT. I don't know—exactly. Something—on that island.

BARTLETT. (*he gets to his feet with a forced burst of laughter*) Ye fool of a boy! Ye got that notion out o' some fool

book ye've been reading, didn't ye? And I thought ye'd growed to be a man! (*More and more wild in his forced scorn*) Ye'll be tellin' me next it's buried treasure I be sailin' after—pirates' gold buried on that island—all in a chest—and a map to guide me with a cross marked on it where the gold is hid! And then they be ghosts guardin' it, ben't they—spirits o' murdered men? They always be, in the books. (*He laughs scornfully*).

NAT. (*gazing at him with fascinated eyes*) No, not that last. That's silly—but I did think you might have found——

BARTLETT. (*laughing again*) Treasure? Gold? (*With forced sternness*) Nat, I be ashamed of ye. Ye've had schoolin', and ye've been doin' a man's work in the world, and doin' it well, and I'd hoped ye'd take my place here to home when I be away, and look after your Ma and Sue. But ye've owned up to bein' little better nor a boy in short britches, dreamin' o' pirates' gold that never was 'cept in books.

NAT. But you—you're to blame. When you first came home you did nothing but talk mysteriously of how rich we'd all be when the schooner got back.

BARTLETT. (*roughly*) But what's that to do with silly dreams? It's in the line o' trade I meant.

NAT. But why be so mysterious about trade? There's something you're hiding. You can't say no because I feel it.

BARTLETT. (*insinuatingly—with a crafty glance at his son*) Supposin' in one of them Eastern trading ports I'd run across a bit o' business with a chance for a fortune in it for a man that wasn't afeerd of the law, and could keep his mouth shut?

NAT. (*disappointed*) You mean illegal trading?

BARTLETT. I mean what I mean, Nat—and I'd be a fool to

tell an overgrown boy, or two women—or any man in the world, for the matter o' that—what I do mean.

NAT. (*turning toward the door in the rear—disgustedly*) If it's only that, I don't want to hear it. (*He walks toward the door—stops and turns again to his father*) No, I don't believe it. That's not like you. You're not telling the truth, Pa.

BARTLETT. (*rising to his feet—with a savage sternness in which there is a wild note of entreaty*) I've listened to your fool's talk enough. Get up to the house where ye belong! I'll stand no more o' your meddling in business o' mine. I've been patient with ye, but there's an end to that! Take heed o' what I'm sayin', if ye know what's good for ye! (*With a sort of somber pride*) I'll stand alone in this business and finish it out alone if I go to hell for it. Ye hear me?

NAT. (*alarmed by this outburst—submissively*) Yes, Pa.

BARTLETT. Then see that ye heed. (*After a pause—as NAT lingers*) They'll be waitin' for ye at the house.

NAT. All right. I'll go. (*He turns to the doorway on the left, but before he gets to it, the door is pushed open and MRS.*

BARTLETT enters. NAT stops, startled) Ma!

MRS. BARTLETT. (*with a forced smile*) Run along, Nat. It's all right. I want to speak with your Pa.

BARTLETT. (*uneasily*) Ye'd best go up with Nat, Sarah. I've work to do.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*fixing her eyes on her husband*) I want to talk with you alone, Isaiah.

BARTLETT. (*grimly—as if he were accepting a challenge*) As ye like, then.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*dismissing NAT with a feeble attempt at a smile*) Tell Sue I'll be comin' up directly, Nat.

NAT. (*hesitates for a moment, looking from one to the other uneasily*) All right, Ma. (*He goes out*).

BARTLETT. (*waits for NAT to get out of hearing*) Won't ye set, Sarah? (*She comes forward and sits by the table. He sits by the other side*).

MRS. BARTLETT. (*shuddering as she sees the bottle on the table*) Will drinkin' this poison make you forget, Isaiah?

BARTLETT. (*gruffly*) I've naught to forget—leastways naught that's in your mind. But they's things about the stubborn will o' woman I'd like to forget. (*They look at each other across the table. There is a pause. Finally he cannot stand her accusing glance. He looks away, gets to his feet, walks about, then sits down again, his face set determinedly—with a grim smile*) Well, here we be, Sarah—alone together for the first time since——

MRS. BARTLETT. (*quickly*) Since that night, Isaiah.

BARTLETT. (*as if he hadn't heard*) Since I come back to you, almost. Did ye ever stop to think o' how strange it be we'd ever come to this? I never dreamed a day 'd come when ye'd force me to sleep away from ye, alone in a shed like a mangy dog!

MRS. BARTLETT. (*gently*) I didn't drive you away, Isaiah. You came o' your own will.

BARTLETT. Because o' your naggin' tongue, woman—and the wrong ye thought o' me.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*shaking her head, slowly*) It wasn't me you ran from, Isaiah. You ran away from your own self—the conscience God put in you that you think you can fool with lies.

BARTLETT. (*starting to his feet—angrily*) Lies?

MRS. BARTLETT. It's the truth, Isaiah, only you be too weak to face it.

BARTLETT. (*with defiant bravado*) Ye'll find I be strong enough to face anything, true or lie! (*Then protestingly*) What call have ye to think evil o' me, Sarah? It's mad o' ye to hold me to account for things I said in my sleep—for the damned nightmares that set me talkin' wild when I'd just come home and my head was still cracked with the thirst and the sun I'd borne on that island. Is that right, woman, to be blamin' me for mad dreams?

MRS. BARTLETT. You confessed the rest of what you said was true—of the gold you'd found and buried there.

BARTLETT. (*with a sudden fierce exultation*) Aye—that be true as Bible, Sarah. When I've sailed back in the schooner, ye'll see for yourself. There be a big chest o' it, yellow and heavy, and fixed up with diamonds, emeralds and sech, that be worth more, even, nor the gold. We'll be rich, Sarah—rich like I've always dreamed we'd be! There'll be silks and carriages for ye—all the woman's truck in the world ye've a mind to want—and all that Nat and Sue'll want, too.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*with a shudder*) Are you tryin' to bribe me, Isaiah—with a treasure that's cursed by God?

BARTLETT. (*as if he hadn't heard*) D'ye remember long ago, how I'd talk to ye o' findin' ambergris, a pile o' it on one vige that'd make us rich? Ye used to take interest then, and all the vige with me ye'd be hopin' I'd find it, too.

MRS. BARTLETT. That was my sin o' greed that I'm bein' punished for now.

BARTLETT. (*again as if he hadn't heard*) And now when

the gold's come to us at last—bigger nor I ever dreamed on—ye drive me away from ye and say it's cursed.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*inexorably*) Cursed with the blood o' the man and boy ye murdered!

BARTLETT. (*in a mad rage*) Ye lie, woman! I spoke no word!

MRS. BARTLETT. That's what you kept repeatin' in your sleep, night after night that first week you was home, till I knew the truth, and could bear no more. "I spoke no word!" you kept sayin', as if 'twas your own soul had you at the bar of judgment. And "That cook, he didn't believe 'twas gold," you'd say, and curse him.

BARTLETT. (*wildly*) He was lyin', the thief! Lyin' so's he and the boy could steal th' gold. I made him own up he was lyin'. What if it's all true, what ye heard? Hadn't we the right to do away with two thieves? And we was all mad with thirst and sun. Can ye hold madmen to account for the things they do?

MRS. BARTLETT. You wasn't so crazed but you remember.

BARTLETT. I remember I spoke no word, Sarah—as God's my judge!

MRS. BARTLETT. But you could have prevented it with a word, couldn't you, Isaiah? That heathen savage lives in the fear of you. He'd not have done it if——

BARTLETT. (*gloomily*) That's woman's talk. There be three o' us can swear in any court I spoke no word.

MRS. BARTLETT. What are courts? Can you swear it to yourself? You can't, and it's that's drivin' you mad, Isaiah. Oh, I'd never have believed it of you for all you said in sleep, if it wasn't for the way you looked and acted out of sleep. I watched

you that first week, Isaiah, till the fear of it had me down sick. I had to watch you, you was so strange and fearful to me. At first I kept sayin', 'twas only you wasn't rid o' the thirst and the sun yet. But then, all to once, God gave me sight, and I saw 'twas guilt written on your face, on the queer stricken way you acted, and guilt in your eyes. (*She stares into them*) I see it now, as I always see it when you look at me. (*She covers her face with her hands with a sob*).

BARTLETT. (*his face haggard and drawn—hopelessly, as if he were too beaten to oppose her further—in a hoarse whisper*) What would ye have me do, Sarah?

MRS. BARTLETT. (*taking her hands from her face—her eyes lighting up with religious fervor*) Confess your sin, Isaiah! Confess to God and men, and make your peace and take your punishment. Forget that gold that's cursed and the voyage you be settin' out on, and make your peace. (*Passionately*) I ask you to do this for my sake and the children's, and your own most of all! I'll get down on my knees, Isaiah, and pray you to do it, as I've prayed to God to send you His grace! Confess and wash your soul of the stain o' blood that's on it. I ask you that, Isaiah—and God asks you—to make your peace with Him.

BARTLETT. (*his face tortured by the inward struggle—as if the word strangled him*) Confess and let someone steal the gold! (*This thought destroys her influence over him in a second. His obsession regains possession of him instantly, filling him with rebellious strength. He laughs harshly*) Ye'd make an old woman o' me, would ye, Sarah?—an old, Sunday go-to-meetin' woman snivelin' and prayin' to God for pardon? Pardon for what? Because two sneakin' thieves are dead and done for? I spoke no word, I tell ye—but if I had, I'd not repent it.

What I've done I've done, and I've never asked pardon o' God or men for ought I've done, and never will. Confess, and give up the gold I've dreamed of all my life that I've found at last! By thunder, ye must think I'm crazed!

MRS. BARTLETT. (*seeming to shrivel up on her chair as she sees she has lost—weakly*) You be lost, Isaiah—and no one can stop you.

BARTLETT. (*triumphantly*) Aye, none'll stop me. I'll go my course alone. I'm glad ye see that, Sarah.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*feebly trying to get to her feet*) I'll go to home.

BARTLETT. Ye'll stay, Sarah. Ye've had your say, and I've listened to ye; now I'll have mine and ye listen to me. (MRS. BARTLETT *sinks back in her chair exhaustedly*. BARTLETT *continues slowly*) The schooner sails at dawn on the full tide. I ask ye again and for the last time, will ye christen her with your name afore she sails?

MRS. BARTLETT. (*firmly*) No.

BARTLETT. (*menacingly*) Take heed, Sarah, o' what ye're sayin'! I'm your husband ye've sworn to obey. By right I kin order ye, not ask.

MRS. BARTLETT. I've never refused in anything that's right—but this be wicked wrong.

BARTLETT. It's only your stubborn woman's spite makes ye refuse. Ye've christened every ship I've ever been skipper on, and it's brought me luck o' a kind, though not the luck I wanted. And ye'll christen this one with your own name to bring me the luck I've always been seekin'.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*resolutely*) I won't, Isaiah.

BARTLETT. Ye will, Sarah, for I'll make ye. Ye force me to it.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*again trying to get up*) Is this the way you talk to me who've been a good wife to you for more than thirty years?

BARTLETT. (*commandingly*) Wait! (*Threateningly*) If ye don't christen her afore she sails, I'll take Nat on the vige along with me. (MRS. BARTLETT *sinks back in her chair, stunned*) He wants to go, ye know it. He's asked me a hundred times. He s'spects—'bout the gold—but he don't know for sartin. But I'll tell him the truth o' it, and he'll come with me, unless—

MRS. BARTLETT. (*looking at him with terror-stricken eyes—imploringly*) You won't do that, Isaiah? You won't take Nat away from me and drag him into sin? I know he'll go if you give him the word, in spite of what I say. (*Pitifully*) You be only frightenin' me! You can't be so wicked cruel as that.

BARTLETT. I'll do it, I take my oath—unless—

MRS. BARTLETT. (*with hysterical anger*) Then I'll tell him myself—of the murders you did, and—

BARTLETT. (*grimly*) And I'll say 'twas done in fair fight to keep them from stealin' the gold! I'll tell him yours is a woman's notion, and he'll believe me, not you. He's his father's son, and he's set to go. Ye know it, Sarah. (*She falls back in the chair hopelessly staring at him with horrified eyes. He turns away and adds after a pause*) So ye'll christen the Sarah Allen in the mornin' afore she sails, won't ye, Sarah?

MRS. BARTLETT. (*in a terrified tone*) Yes—if it's needful to save Nat—and God'll forgive me when He sees my reason. But you— Oh, Isaiah! (*She shudders and then breaks down, sobbing*).

BARTLETT. (*after a pause, turns to her humbly as if asking forgiveness*) Ye mustn't think hard o' me that I want your name. It's because it's a good woman's name, and I know it'll bring luck to our vige. I'd find it hard to sail without it—the way things be.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*getting to her feet—in a state of feverish fear of him*) I'm goin' to home.

BARTLETT. (*going to her*) I'll help ye to the top o' the hill, Sarah.

MRS. BARTLETT. (*shrinking from him in terror*) No. Don't you touch me! Don't you touch me! (*She hobbles quickly out of the door in the rear, looking back frightenedly over her shoulder to see if he is following as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT THREE

SCENE. *Dawn of the following morning—exterior of the BARTLETT home, showing the main entrance, facing left, toward the harbor. On either side of the door, two large windows, their heavy green shutters tightly closed. In front of the door, a small porch, the roof supported by four white columns. A flight of three steps goes up to this porch from the ground. Two paths lead to the steps through the straggly patches of grass, one around the corner of the house to the rear, the other straight to the left to the edge of the cliff where there is a small projecting iron platform, fenced in by a rail. The top of a steel ladder can be seen. This ladder leads up the side of the cliff from the shore below to the platform. The edge of the cliff extends from the left corner front, half-diagonally back to the right, rear-center.*

In the gray half-light of the dawn, HORNE, CATES, and JIMMY KANAKA are discovered. HORNE is standing on the steel platform looking down at the shore below. CATES is sprawled on the ground nearby. JIMMY squats on his haunches, his eyes staring out to sea as if he were trying to pierce the distance to the warm islands of his birth. CATES wears dungarees, JIMMY dungaree pants and a black jersey, HORNE the same as in Act Two.

CATES. *(with sluggish indifference)* Ain't she finished with it yet?

HORNE. (*irritably*) No, damn her! I kin see 'em all together on the wharf at the bow o' the schooner.

CATES. (*after a pause*) Funny, ain't it—his orderin' us to come up here and wait till it's all done.

HORNE. There's nothin' funny to me that he does no more. He's still out o' his head, d'ye know that, Cates?

CATES. (*stupidly*) I ain't noticed nothin' diff'rent 'bout him.

HORNE. (*scornfully*) He axed me if I ever seen them two in my sleep—that cook and the boy o' the Triton. Said he did often.

CATES. (*immediately protesting uneasily as if he had been accused*) They was with us in the boat b'fore we fetched the island, that's all 'bout 'em I remember. I was crazy, after.

HORNE. (*looking at him with contempt*) I'll not call ye a liar, Cates, but—a hell o' a man ye be! You wasn't so out o' your head that ye forgot the gold, was ye?

CATES. (*his eyes glistening*) Any man'd remember that, even if he was crazy.

HORNE. (*with a greedy grin*) Aye. That's the one thing I see in my sleep. (*There is the faint sound of cries from the beach below. HORNE starts and turns to look down again*) They must 'a' finished it. (*CATES and JIMMY come to the edge to look down*).

JIMMY. (*suddenly—with an eager childish curiosity*) That falla wife Captain she make strong falla spell on ship, we sail fast, plenty good wind?

HORNE. (*contemptuously*) Aye, that's as near as ye'll come to it. She's makin' a spell. Ye stay here, Jimmy, and tell us when the Old Man is comin'. (*JIMMY remains looking down*).

HORNE *motions* CATES to follow him, front—then in a low voice, *disgustedly*) Did ye hear that damn fool nigger?

CATES. (*grumbly*) Why the hell is the Old Man givin' him a full share? One piece o' it'd be enough for a nigger like him.

HORNE. (*craftily*) There's a way to get rid o' him—if it comes to that. He knifed them two, ye remember.

CATES. Aye.

HORNE. The two o' us can take oath to that.

CATES. Aye.

HORNE. (*after a calculating look into his companion's greedy eyes—meaningly*) We're two sane men, Cates—and the other two to share is a lunatic and a nigger. The skipper's showed me where there's a copy o' his map o' the island locked up in the cabin—in case anything happens to him I'm to bring back the gold to his woman, he says. (*He laughs harshly*) Catch me! The fool! I'll be open with ye, Cates. If I could navigate and find the island myself I wouldn't wait for a cracked man to take me there. No, be damned if I would! Me and you'd chance it alone some way or other.

CATES. (*greedily*) The two o' us—share and share alike! (*Then shaking his head warningly*) But he's a hard man to git the best on.

HORNE. (*grimly*) And I be a hard man, too.

JIMMY. (*turning to them*) Captain, he come. (CATES and HORNE *separate hastily*. BARTLETT *climbs into sight up the ladder to the platform*. He is breathing heavily but his expression is one of triumphant exultation).

BARTLETT. (*motions with his arms*) Down with ye and git

aboard. The schooner's got a name now—a name that'll bring us luck. We'll sail on this tide.

HORNE. Aye—aye, sir.

BARTLETT. I got to wait here till they climb up the path. I'll be aboard afore long. See that ye have her ready to cast off by then.

HORNE. Aye—aye, sir. (*He and CATES disappear down the ladder. JIMMY lingers, looking sidewise at his Captain*).

BARTLETT. (*noticing him—gruffly*) What are ye waitin' for?

JIMMY. (*volubly*) That old falla wife belong you, Captain, she make strong falla spell for wind blow plenty? She catch strong devil charm for schooner, Captain?

BARTLETT. (*scowling*) What's that, ye brown devil? (*Then suddenly laughing harshly*) Yes—a strong spell to bring us luck. (*Roughly*) Git aboard, ye dog! Don't let her find ye here with me. (*JIMMY disappears hurriedly down the ladder. BARTLETT remains at the edge looking down after him. There is a sound of voices from the right and presently MRS. BARTLETT, SUE, DREW and NAT enter, coming around the house from the rear. NAT and DREW walk at either side of MRS. BARTLETT, who is in a state of complete collapse, so that they are practically carrying her. SUE follows, her handkerchief to her eyes. NAT keeps his eyes on the ground, his expression fixed and gloomy. DREW casts a glance of angry indignation at the Captain, who, after one indifferent look at them, has turned back to watch the operations on the schooner below*).

BARTLETT. (*as they reach the steps of the house—intent on the work below—makes a megaphone of his hands and shouts in stentorian tones*) Look lively there, Horne!

SUE. (*protestingly*) Pa!

BARTLETT. (*wheels about. When he meets his daughter's eyes he controls his angry impatience and speaks gently*) What d'ye want, Sue?

SUE. (*pointing to her mother who is being assisted through the door—her voice trembling*) You mustn't shout. She's very sick.

BARTLETT. (*dully, as if he didn't understand*) Sick?

SUE. (*turning to the door*) Wait. I'll be right back. (*She enters the house. As soon as she is gone all of BARTLETT's excitement returns. He paces up and down with nervous impatience. NAT comes out of the house.*)

NAT. (*in a tone of anxiety*) Ma seems bad. I'm going for the doctor.

BARTLETT. (*as if he hadn't heard—draws NAT's attention to the schooner*) Smart lines on that schooner, boy. She'll sail hell bent in a breeze. I knowed what I was about when I bought her.

NAT. (*staring down fascinatedly*) How long will the voyage take?

BARTLETT. (*preoccupied*) How long?

NAT. (*insinuatingly*) To get to the island.

BARTLETT. Three months at most—with fair luck. (*exultantly*) And I'll have luck now!

NAT. Then in six months you may be back—with it?

BARTLETT. Aye, with—— (*Stopping abruptly, turns and stares into his son's eyes—angrily*) With what? What boy's foolishness be ye talkin'?

NAT. (*pleading fiercely*) I want to go, Pa! There's no

good in my staying here any more. I can't think of anything but——

BARTLETT. (*sternly, to conceal his uneasiness*) Keep clear o' this, boy, I've warned ye!

SUE. (*appearing in doorway—indignantly*) Nat! Haven't you gone for the doctor yet?

NAT. (*shamefacedly*) I forgot.

SUE. Forgot!

NAT. (*starting off*) I'm going, Sue. (*Then over his shoulder*) You won't sail before I come back, Pa. (*BARTLETT does not answer. NAT stands miserably hesitating*).

SUE. Nat! For heaven's sake! (*NAT hurries off around the corner of the house, rear. SUE comes to her father who is watching her with a queer, humble, hunted expression*).

BARTLETT. Well, Sue?

SUE. (*her voice trembling*) Oh, Pa, how could you drag Ma out of bed to christen your old boat—when you knew how sick she's been!

BARTLETT. (*avoiding her eyes*) It's only weakness. She'll get well o' it soon.

SUE. Pa! How can you say things like that—as if you didn't care! (*Accusingly*) The way you've acted ever since you've been home almost, anyone would think—you *hated* her!

BARTLETT. (*wincing*) No!

SUE. Oh, Pa, what is it that has come between you? Can't you tell me? Can't I help to set things right again?

BARTLETT. (*mumbly*) Nothin'—nothin' ye kin help—nor me.

SUE. But things can't go on like this. Don't you see it's killing Ma?

BARTLETT. She'll forget her stubborn notions, now I be sailin' away.

SUE. But you're not—not going for a while now, are you?

BARTLETT. Ain't I been sayin' I'd sail at dawn today?

SUE. (*looking at him for a moment with shocked amazement*) But—you can't mean—right now!

BARTLETT. (*keeping his face averted*) Aye—or we'll miss this tide.

SUE. (*putting her hands on his shoulders and trying to look into his face*) Pa! You can't mean that! (*His face is set with his obsessed determination. She lets her hands fall with a shudder*) You can't be as cruel as that! Why, I thought, of course, you'd put off—(*wildly*) You have, haven't you, Pa? You did tell those men you couldn't sail when you saw how sick Ma was, didn't you—when she fainted down on the wharf?

BARTLETT. (*implacably*) I said I was sailin' by this tide!

SUE. Pa! (*Then pleadingly*) When the doctor comes and you hear what he says——

BARTLETT. (*roughly*) I ain't stoppin' on his word nor any man's. (*Intensely*) That schooner's been fit to sail these two weeks past. I been waitin' on her stubborn will (*he gestures toward the house*), eatin' my heart out day and night. Then I swore I'd sail today. I tell ye, Sue, I got a feelin' in my bones if I don't put out now I never will. Aye, I feel it deep down inside me. (*In a tone of superstitious awe*) And when she christened the schooner—jest to the minute, mind ye!—a fair breeze sprung up and come down out o' the land to blow her out to sea—like a sign o' good luck.

SUE. (*aroused to angry indignation*) Oh, I can't believe you're the same man who used to be my father!

BARTLETT. Sue!

SUE. To talk cold-bloodedly of sailing away on a long voyage when Ma's inside—dying for all you seem to know or care! You're not the father I love! You've changed into someone else—hateful and cruel—and I hate him, I hate him! (*She breaks down, sobbing hysterically*).

BARTLETT. (*who has listened to her with a face suddenly stricken by fear and torturing remorse*) Sue! Ye don't know what ye be sayin', do ye?

SUE. I do! And I hate those three awful men who make you act this way. I hate the schooner! I wish she and they were at the bottom of the sea!

BARTLETT. (*frenziedly—putting his hand over her mouth to stop her words*) Stop, girl! Don't ye dare——

SUE. (*shrinking away from him—frightenedly*) Pa!

BARTLETT. (*bewilderedly, pleading for forgiveness*) Don't heed that, Sue—I didn't mean—ye git me so riled—I'd not hurt ye for all the gold in the world. But don't ye talk wrong o' things ye can't know on.

SUE. Oh, Pa, what kind of things must they be—when you're ashamed to tell them!

BARTLETT. Ye'll know all they be to know—and your Ma and Nat, too—when I come back from this vige. Oh, ye'll be glad enough then—when ye see with your own eyes! Ye'll bless me then 'stead o' turning agin me! (*Hesitating for a second—then somberly*) On'y now—till it's all over and done—ye'd best keep clear o' it.

SUE. (*passionately*) I don't want to know anything about

it. What I do know is that you can't sail now. Haven't you any heart at all? Can't you see how bad Ma is?

BARTLETT. It's the sight o' me sickens her.

SUE. No. She called your name just a while ago—the only word she's spoken since she christened the ship.

BARTLETT. (*desperately*) I got to git away from her, I tell ye, Sue! She's been houndin' me ever since I got back—houndin' me with her stubborn tongue till she's druv me mad, a'most! Ye've been on'y givin' thought to her, not me. It's for her sake as much as my own I'm goin'—for her and you and Nat. (*With a sudden return of his old resolution*) I've made up my mind, I tell ye, and in the end ye'll know I be right. (*A hail in HORNE's voice comes thinly up from the shore below. BARTLETT starts, his eyes gleaming*) Ye hear? It's Horne hailin' me to come. They be ready to cast off. I'll git aboard. (*He starts for the ladder*).

SUE. Pa! After all I've said—without one word of good-by to Ma! (*Hysterically*) Oh, what can I do, what can I say to stop you! She hasn't spoken but that one call for you. She hardly seems to breathe. If it weren't for her eyes I'd believe she was dead—but her eyes look for you. She'll die if you go, Pa!

BARTLETT. No!

SUE. You might just as well kill her now in cold blood as murder her that way!

BARTLETT. (*shaken—raising his hands as if to put them over his ears to shut out her words—hoarsely*) No! Ye lie!

DREW. (*appearing in the doorway, his face working with grief and anger—harshly*) Captain Bartlett! (*Then lower-*

ing his voice as he sees SUE) Mrs. Bartlett is asking to see you, Captain, before you go.

SUE. There! Didn't I tell you, Pa!

BARTLETT. (*struggling with himself—dully*) She's wantin' to hound me again, that be all.

SUE. (*seeing him weakening—grasps his hand persuasively*) Pa! Come with me. She won't hound you. How silly you are! Come! (*Hesitatingly, head bowed, he follows her toward the door*).

BARTLETT. (*As he comes to DREW he stops and looks into the young man's angry, accusing face. He mutters half mockingly*) So ye, too, be agin me, Danny?

DREW. (*unable to restrain his indignation*) What man that's a real man wouldn't be against you, sir?

SUE. (*frightenedly*) Danny! Pa!

BARTLETT. (*in a sudden rage draws back his fist threateningly. DREW stares into his eyes unflinchingly—BARTLETT controls himself with an effort and lets his arm fall to his side—scornfully*) Big words from a boy, Danny. I'll forget them this time—on account o' Sue. (*He turns to her*) I'm goin' in to her to please ye, Sue—but if ye think any words that she kin say'll change my mind, ye make a mistake—for I be sailin' out as I planned I would in spite o' all hell! (*He walks resolutely into the house. SUE follows him after exchanging a hopeless glance with DANNY*).

DREW. (*to himself—with a shudder*) He's mad, damn him! (*He paces up and down. HORNE appears on the ladder from below, followed by CATES*).

HORNE. (*coming forward and addressing DREW*) Is the skipper about?

DREW. (*curtly*) He's in the house. You can't speak to him now.

HORNE. She's ready to cast off. I hailed him from below but I s'pect he didn't hear. (*As DREW makes no comment—impatiently*) If he don't shake a leg, we'll miss the tide. There's a bit o' fair breeze, too.

DREW. (*glancing at him resentfully*) Don't count on his sailing today. It's just as likely he'll change his mind.

HORNE. (*angrily*) Change his mind again? After us waitin' and wastin' time for weeks! (*To CATES in a loud tone so DREW can hear*) What did I tell ye, Cates? He's crazy as hell.

DREW. (*sharply*) What's that?

HORNE. I was tellin' Cates the skipper's not right in his head. (*Angrily*) What man in his senses'd do the way he does?

DREW. (*letting his resentment escape him*) That's no lie, damn it!

HORNE. (*surprised*) Aye, ye've seen it, too, have ye? (*After a pause*) Now I axe ye, as a sailor, how'd ye like to be puttin' out on a vige with a cracked man for skipper? (*SUE comes out of the door, stops with a shudder of disgust as she sees the two sailors, and stands listening. They do not notice her presence*).

DREW. It seems to me a crazy voyage all round. (*With sudden interest as if a new idea had come to him*) But you know all about it, don't you—what the Captain plans to do on this voyage—and all that?

HORNE. (*dryly*) Aye, as well as himself—but I'm tellin' no man.

DREW. And I'm not asking. What I want to find out is:

Do you know enough about this business to make this one voyage alone and attend to everything—in case the Captain can't go?

HORNE. (*exchanging a quick glance with CATES—trying to hide his eagerness*) Aye, I could do as well as any man alive. He could trust me for it—and I'd make more money for him than he's likely to make with his head out o' gear. (*Then scowling*) On'y trouble is, who'd captain her if he ain't goin'?

DREW. (*disappointedly*) Then you don't know navigation enough for that?

HORNE. I've never riz above bo'sun. (*Then after a pause in which he appears to be calculating something—curiously*) Why d'ye ask me them questions? (*Insinuatingly—almost in a whisper*) It can't be done 'less we got an officer like you aboard.

DREW. (*angrily*) Eh? What're you driving at?

SUE. (*who has been listening with aroused interest*) Danny! (*She comes down to him. HORNE and CATES bob their heads respectfully and move back near the platform. HORNE watches SUE and DREW out of the corner of his eye*) Danny, I've been listening to what you were saying, but I don't understand. What are you thinking of?

DREW. (*excitedly*) I was thinking—— Listen, Sue! Seems to me your Pa's out of his right mind. Something's got to be done to keep him home in spite of himself. Even leaving your Ma out of it, he's not in any fit state to take a ship to sea; and I was thinking if we could fix it some way so that fellow Horne could take her out on this voyage——

SUE. But, Danny, Pa'd never give in to that.

DREW. I wasn't thinking he would. We—you'd have to give

the word—and keep him in the house somehow—and then when he did come out it'd be too late. The schooner'd be gone.

SUE. (*disturbed, but showing that this plan has caught her mind*) But—he'd never forgive——

DREW. When he's back in his right mind again, he would. (*Earnestly*) You can't let him sail, and wreck his ship and himself in the bargain, likely. Then, there's your Ma——

SUE. No, no, we can't let him, (*with a glance at HORNE and CATES*) But I don't trust those men.

DREW. No more do I; but it would be better to chance them than—(*suddenly interrupting himself—with a shrug of his shoulders*) But I was forgetting. None of them can navigate.

SUE. But didn't I hear him say—if they had an officer on board—like you——

DREW. Yes, but where'll you find one at a second's notice?

SUE. (*meaningly*) And you told me, didn't you, that you'd just got your master's papers.

DREW. (*looking at her with stunned astonishment*) Sue! D'you mean——

SUE. (*a light coming over her face*) Oh, Danny, we could trust you! He'd trust you! And after he'd calmed down I know he wouldn't mind so much. Oh, Danny, it'll break my heart to have you go, to send you away just after you've come back. But I don't see any other way. I wouldn't ask—if it wasn't for Ma being this way—and him— Oh, Danny, can't you see your way to do it—for my sake?

DREW. (*bewilderedly*) Why, Sue, I—I never thought— (*Then as he sees the look of disappointment which comes over her face at his hesitancy—resolutely*) Why sure, Sue, I'll do

it—if you want me to. I'll do it if it can be done. But we've got to hustle. You've got to keep him in the house some way if he aims to come out. And I'll talk to them. (SUE goes to the doorway. DREW goes over to HORNE and CATES).

SUE. (*after listening*) He's still in with Ma. It's all right.

DREW. (*to HORNE*) How would you like me for skipper on this one voyage? Listen here. Miss Sue's decided her father isn't in a fit state to captain this trip.

HORNE. That's no lie.

CATES. (*to HORNE protestingly*) But if we git ketched the Old Man'll take it out o' our hides, not his'n.

HORNE. (*savagely—with a meaning look at CATES*) Shut up, ye fool!

DREW. (*impatiently*) I'll shoulder all that risk, man!

SUE. (*earnestly*) No harm will come to any of you, I promise you.

HORNE. (*in the tone of one clinching a bargain*) Then we'll chance it. (*warningly*) But it's got to be done smart, sir.

DREW. I've got to get my dunnage. I'll be right back and we'll tumble aboard. (*He goes into the house. SUE follows him in*).

CATES. (*with stupid anger*) This is a hell o' a mess we're gettin' in, if ye axe me.

HORNE. And I tell ye it's a great stroke o' luck.

CATES. He'll be aboard to spy on us.

HORNE. Leave me to fool him. And when the time comes to git rid o' him, I'll find a means some way or other.

CATES. (*stupidly*) S'long as he don't git no share o' the gold——

HORNE. (*contemptuously*) Share, ye dumbhead! I'd see

him in hell first—and send him there myself. (*DREW comes out of the house carrying his bag which he hands to CATES. SUE follows him*).

DREW. Look lively now!

HORNE. Aye—aye, sir. (*He and CATES clamber hurriedly down the ladder*).

SUE. (*throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him*) Good-by, Danny. It's so fine of you to do this for us! I'll never forget——

DREW. (*tenderly*) Ssssh! It's nothing, Sue.

SUE. (*tearfully*) Oh, Danny, I hope I'm doing right! I'll miss you so dreadfully! But you'll come back just as soon as you can——

DREW. Of course!

SUE. Danny! Danny! I love you so!

DREW. And I guess you know I love you, don't you? (*Kisses her*) And we'll be married when I come back this time *sure*?

SUE. Yes—yes—Danny—sure!

DREW. I've got to run. Good-by, Sue.

SUE. Good-by, dear. (*They kiss for the last time and he disappears down the ladder. She stands at the top, sobbing, following him with her eyes. NAT comes around the house from the rear and goes to the front door*).

NAT. (*seeing his sister*) Sue! He hasn't gone yet, has he? (*She doesn't hear him. He hesitates in the doorway for a moment, listening for the sound of his father's voice from inside. Then, very careful to make no noise, he tiptoes carefully into the house. SUE waves her hand to DREW who has evidently now got aboard the ship. Then she covers her face with her hands, sobbing. NAT comes out of the house again and goes to his*

sister. *As she sees him approaching, she dries her eyes hastily, trying to smile).*

SUE. Did you get the doctor, Nat?

NAT. Yes, he's coming right away, he promised. (*Looking at her face*) What—have you been crying?

SUE. No. (*She walks away from the edge of the cliff, drawing him with her*).

NAT. Yes, you have. Look at your eyes.

SUE. Oh, Nat, everything's so awful! (*She breaks down again*).

NAT. (*trying to comfort her in an absent-minded way*) There, don't get worked up. Ma'll be all right as soon as the doctor comes. (*Then curiously*) Pa's inside with her. They were arguing—have they made it up, d'you think?

SUE. Oh, Nat, I don't know.

NAT. The strain's been too much for him—waiting and hiding his secret from all of us. What do you suppose it is, Sue?

SUE. (*wildly*) I don't know and I don't care!

NAT. Well, there's something— (*Starts for the platform. SUE does her best to interpose to hold him back*) Are they all ready on the schooner? He'll have to hurry if she's going to sail on this tide. (*With sudden passion*) Oh, I've got to go! I can't stay here! (*Pleadingly*) Don't you think, Sue, if you were to ask him for me he'd— You're the only one he seems to act sane with or care about any more.

SUE. No! I won't! I can't!

NAT. (*angrily*) Haven't you any sense? Wouldn't it be better for everyone if I went in his place?

SUE. No. You know that's a lie. Ma would lose her mind if you went.

NAT. And I'll lose mine if I stay! (*Half aware of SUE's intention to keep him from looking down at the schooner—irritably*) What are you holding my arm for, Sue? I want to see what they're doing. (*He pushes her aside and goes to the platform—excitedly*) Hello, they've got the fores'l and mains'l set. They're setting the stays'l. (*In amazement*) Why—they're casting off! She's moving away from the wharf! (*More and more excitedly*) I see four of them on board! Who—who is that, Sue?

SUE. It's Danny.

NAT. (*furiously*) Danny! What right has he—when I can't! Sue, call Pa! They're sailing, I tell you, you little fool!

SUE. (*trying to calm him—her voice trembling*) Nat! Don't be such a donkey! Danny's only going a little way—just trying the boat to see how she sails while they're waiting for Pa.

NAT. (*uncertainly*) Oh. (*Then bitterly*) I was never allowed to do even that—his own son! Look, Sue, that must be Danny at the stern waving.

SUE. (*brokenly*) Yes. (*She waves her handkerchief over her head—then breaks down, sobbing again. There is the noise of BARTLETT's voice from inside and a moment later he appears in the doorway. He seems terribly shattered, at the end of his tether. He hesitates uncertainly, looking about him wildly as if he didn't know what to do or where to go.*)

SUE. (*after one look at his face, runs to him and flings her arms about his neck*) Pa! (*She weeps on his shoulder.*)

BARTLETT. Sue, ye did wrong beggin' me to see her. I knowed it'd do no good. Ye promised she'd not hound me—

"Confess," she says—when they be naught to tell that couldn't be swore to in any court. "Don't go on this vige," she says, "there be the curse o' God on it." (*With a note of baffled anguish*) She kin say that after givin' the ship her own name! (*With wild, haggard defiance*) But curse or no curse, I be goin'! (*He moves toward the platform, SUE clinging to his arm*).

SUE. (*frightenedly*) Pa! Go back in the house, won't you?

BARTLETT. I be sorry to go agin your will, Sue, but it's got to be. Ye'll know the reason some day—and be glad o' it. And now good-by to ye. (*With a sudden strange tenderness he bends and kisses his daughter. Then as she seems about to protest further, his expression becomes stern and inflexible*) No more o' talk, Sue! I be bound out. (*He takes her hand off his arm and strides to the platform. One look down at the harbor and he stands transfixed—in a hoarse whisper*) What damned trick be this? (*He points to the schooner and turns to NAT bewilderedly*) Ain't that my schooner, boy—the Sarah Allen—reachin' toward the p'int?

NAT. (*surprised*) Yes, certainly. Didn't you know? Danny's trying her to see how she sails while they're waiting for you.

BARTLETT. (*with a tremendous sigh of relief*) Aye. (*Then angrily*) He takes a lot o' rope to himself without askin' leave o' me. Don't he know they's no time to waste on boy's foolin'? (*Then with admiration*) She sails smart, don't she, boy? I knowed she'd show a pair o' heels.

NAT. (*with enthusiasm*) Yes, she's a daisy! Say, Danny's taking her pretty far out, isn't he?

BARTLETT. (*anxiously*) He'd ought to come about now if he's to tack back inside the p'int. (*Furiously*) Come about,

damn ye! The swab! That's what comes o' steamer trainin'. I'd sooner trust Sue to sail her nor him. (*Waves his arm and shouts*) Come about!

NAT. (*bitterly*) He seems to be heading straight for the open sea. He's taking quite a sail, it seems to me.

BARTLETT. (*as if he couldn't believe his eyes*) He's passed the p'int—and now—headin' her out to sea—so'east by east. By God, that be the course I charted for her! (*SUE bursts out sobbing. He wheels on her, his mouth fallen open, his face full of a stupid despair*) They be somethin' wrong here. What be it, Sue? What be it, Nat? (*His voice has begun to quiver with passion*) That schooner—she's sailin' without me—— (*He suddenly springs at NAT and grabs him by the throat—with hoarse fury, shaking him*) What be it, ye whelp? It's your doin'—because I wouldn't let ye go. Answer me!

SUE. (*rushing to them with a scream*) Pa! (*She tugs frantically at his hands. BARTLETT lets them fall to his side, stepping back from NAT who sinks weakly to the ground, gasping for breath. BARTLETT stands looking at him wildly*).

SUE. Nat didn't know, Pa. It's all my fault. I had to do it. There was no other way——

BARTLETT. (*raging*) What d'ye mean, girl? What is it ye've done? Tell me, I say! Tell me or I'll——

SUE. (*unflinchingly*) You had to be stopped from going some way. So I asked Danny if he wouldn't make the trip in your place. He's just got his captain's papers—and oh, Pa, you can trust him, you know that! That man Horne said he knows about everything you wanted done, and he promised to tell Danny, and Danny'll come back——

BARTLETT. (*chokingly*) So—that be it—— (*Shaking his*

clenched fist at the sky as if visualizing the fate he feels in all of this) Curse ye! Curse ye! (He subsides weakly, his strength spent, his hand falls limply at his side).

MRS. BARTLETT. *(appears in the doorway. Her face is pale with anguish. She gives a cry of joy when she sees her son) Nat! (Then with a start of horror as her eyes fall on her husband) Isaiah! (He doesn't seem to hear) Then—you ain't sailed yet?*

SUE. *(going to her—gently) No, Ma, he isn't going to sail. He's going to stay home with you. But the schooner's gone. See. (She points and her mother's eyes turn seaward).*

BARTLETT. *(aloud to himself—in a tone of groping superstitious awe and bewildered fear) They be somethin' queer—somethin' wrong—they be a curse in this somewhere——*

MRS. BARTLETT. *(turning accusing eyes on him—with a sort of fanatical triumph) I'm glad to hear you confess that, Isaiah. Yes, there be a curse—God's curse on the wicked sinfulness o' men—and I thank God He's saved you from the evil of that voyage, and I'll pray Him to visit His punishment and His curse on them three men on that craft you forced me to give my name—— (She has raised her hand as if calling down retribution on the schooner she can dimly see).*

SUE. *(terrified) Ma!*

BARTLETT. *(starting toward his wife with an insane yell of fury) Stop it, I tell ye! (He towers over her with upraised fist as if to crush her).*

SUE. Pa!

NAT. *(starting to his feet from where he has been sitting on the ground—hoarsely) Pa! For God's sake!*

MRS. BARTLETT. *(gives a weak, frightened gasp) Would you*

murder me too, Isaiah? (*She closes her eyes and collapses in SUE's arms*).

SUE. (*tremblingly*) Nat! Help me! Quick! We must carry her to bed. (*They take their mother in their arms, carrying her inside the house*).

BARTLETT. (*while they are doing this, rushes in his mad frenzy to the platform over the edge of the cliff. He puts his hands to his mouth, megaphone-fashion, and yells with despairing rage*) Ahoy! Ahoy! Sarah Allen! Put back! Put back! as

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT FOUR

SCENE. *About nine o'clock of a moonlight night one year later—CAPTAIN BARTLETT'S "cabin," a room erected on the top of his house as a lookout post. The interior is fitted up like the cabin of a sailing vessel. On the left, forward, a porthole. Farther back, the stairs of the companionway. Still farther, two more portholes. In the rear, left, a marble-topped side-board. In the rear, center, a door opening on stairs which lead to the lower house. A cot with a blanket is placed against the wall to the right of door. In the right wall, five portholes. Directly under them, a wooden bench. In front of the bench, a long table with two chairs placed, one in front, one to the left of it. A cheap, dark-colored rug is on the floor. In the ceiling, midway from front to rear, a skylight extending from opposite the door to above the left edge of the table. In the right extremity of the skylight is placed a floating ship's compass. The light from the binnacle sheds down over this and seeps into the room, casting a vague globular shadow of the compass on the floor. Moonlight creeps in through the portholes on the right. A lighted lantern is on the table.*

As the curtain rises, SUE and DOCTOR BERRY are discovered sitting by the table. The doctor is a man of sixty or so, hale and hearty-looking, his white hair and mustache setting off his ruddy complexion. His blue eyes have a gentle expression, his smile is kindly and sympathetic. His whole manner toward SUE is that of the old family doctor and friend, not the least of whose duties is to play father-confessor to his patients. She

is dressed in deep mourning. She looks much older. But there is an excited elation in her face at present, her eyes are alight with some unexpected joy.

SUE. (*excitedly*) And here is Danny's letter, Doctor—to prove it's all true. (*She takes a letter from the bosom of her dress and holds it out to him*).

DOCTOR. (*takes it with a smile, patting her hand*) I can't say how glad I am, Susan. Coming after we'd all given him up for lost—it's like a miracle.

SUE. (*smiling happily*) Read what he says.

DOCTOR. (*hesitating—playfully*) I don't know that it's right for me—love letters at my age!

SUE. I want you to read it. (*He reaches in his pocket for his spectacles. SUE continues gratefully*) As if I could have any secrets from you after all you've done for us since Ma died. You've been the only friend—— (*She stops, her lips trembling*).

DOCTOR. Tut-tut. (*He adjusts his spectacles and peers at her over them*) Who wouldn't be of all the service he could to a brave girl like you? This past year—with your mother's death—and then the news of the schooner being reported lost—not many could have stood it—living in this house with him the way he is—even if he was their father.

SUE. (*glancing up at the skylight—apprehensively*) Sssh! He might hear you.

DOCTOR. (*listening intently*) Not him. There he goes pacing up and down, looking out to sea for that ship that will never come back! (*Shaking himself*) Brrr! This house of mad dreams!

SUE. Don't you think Pa'll come to realize the schooner is lost as time goes by and she doesn't come back?

DOCTOR. No, your father won't let himself look the facts in the face. If he did, probably the shock of it would kill him. That darn dream of his has become his life. No, Susan, as time goes on he'll believe in it harder and harder. After observing him for the past year—and I speak for his own sake, too, as his good friend for twenty years or more—my final advice is the same: Send him to an asylum.

SUE. (*with a shudder*) No, Doctor.

DOCTOR. (*shaking his head*) You'll have to come to it in time. He's getting worse. No one can tell—he might get violent——

SUE. How can you say that? You know how gentle and sane he is with me.

DOCTOR. You're his one connecting link with things as they are—but that can't last. Eh, well, my dear, one thing you've got to realize: Your father and Nat must be separated somehow. Nat's going to pieces. I'll bet he doesn't believe that schooner is lost any more than your father does.

SUE. You mean he still hopes it may not be true. That's only natural. He's in San Francisco now tracing down the report again. He saw in the papers where the British freighter that found the derelict was there and he went to talk with the people on board. I'm hoping he'll come back fully convinced, with the whole thing out of his mind.

DOCTOR. (*shaking his head—gravely*) I've watched him and talked with him. You've got to persuade Nat to go away, Susan.

SUE. (*helplessly*) I don't know—— (*Then brightening*) Just now it's enough to know Danny's alive and coming back. Read his letter, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Yes, yes, let's see. (*He takes the letter from the envelope*).

SUE. Poor Danny! He's been through terrible things.

DOCTOR. Hmm! Rangoon.

SUE. Yes, he's still in the hospital there. You'll see.

DOCTOR. (*reads the letter—grunts with astonishment—angrily*) By Gad! The damn scoundrels!

SUE. (*shuddering*) Yes, wasn't it hideous—those awful men stabbing him and leaving him for dead in that out of the way native settlement! And then he was laid up for four months there waiting for a vessel to touch and take him back to civilization. And then, think of it, getting the fever on top of all that and nearly dying in the hospital in Rangoon!

DOCTOR. A terrible time of it! He's lucky to be alive. Hmm. I see he foresaw the wreck of the schooner. (*Folding the letter and putting it back*) He doesn't seem to have found out what the purpose of that mad trip was. Horne hid it from him to the last, he says. Well, it's queer—damn queer. But I'm glad to know those wretches have gone to their final accounting.

SUE. (*with a shudder*) I was always afraid of them. They looked like—murderers. (*At a noise from below they both start. Steps can be heard climbing the stairs. SUE jumps to her feet frightenedly*) Why—do you hear—who can that be? (*There is a soft rap on the door. The DOCTOR jumps to his feet. SUE turns to him with a half-hysterical laugh*) Shall I open? I don't know why—but I'm afraid.

DOCTOR. Tut-tut! I'll see who it is. (*He opens the door and NAT is discovered on the stairs outside*) Why hello, boy. You gave us a scare. Susan thought it was a ghost knocking.

NAT. (*comes into the room. He has aged, grown thin, his face gaunt and drawn from continual mental strain, his eyes moody and preoccupied. He glances up at the skylight apprehensively, then turns to SUE*) I didn't find you downstairs so I—— (*Then to the DOCTOR*) Yes, you do grow to look for ghosts in this house, don't you? (*Again glancing upward*) He's up there as usual, I suppose—looking for a ship that'll never, never come now!

DOCTOR. (*with a grunt of approval*) I'm glad to hear you acknowledge that.

SUE. (*who is just recovering from her fright*) But, Nat, I didn't expect you—— Did you find out——?

NAT. Yes, I talked with several of the men who were on board at the time. They said they steamed in so close to the schooner it was easy to read the name with the naked eye. All agreed—Sarah Allen, Harborport. They even remembered how her taffrail was painted. There's no chance for mistake. The Sarah Allen is gone. (*With great emphasis*) And I'm glad—damn glad! I feel free again, and I can go back to work—but not here. I've got to go away—start new altogether.

SUE. (*happily, coming and putting her arms around him*) It's so good to hear you talk like your old self again.

DOCTOR. (*earnestly*) Yes, Nat, by Gad, that's sound sense. Get out of this.

NAT. (*giving him a queer look*) I suppose you thought I was doomed, eh?—like him. (*He makes a motion upward—then with an uncertain laugh*) A doctor's always looking for trouble where there isn't any. (*In a tone of finality*) Well, it's all over, anyway.

SUE. (*snatching the letter from the table*) Oh, I was forgetting, Nat. Read this. I got it yesterday.

NAT. (*turns it over in his hands suspiciously*) Who from?

SUE. Open it and see.

NAT. (*does so and turns over the pages to read the signature—he gives a start—hoarsely*) Danny! It can't be! But it's his writing sure enough! (*He exclaims with a sudden wild exultation*) Then they must have been lying to me!

SUE. No, the Sarah Allen was wrecked all right, but that was afterwards. Read it. You'll see. (*NAT sinks back on a chair, evidently depressed by this information. He starts to read the letter with unconcealed indifference, then becomes engrossed, excited, the paper trembling in his hands. The DOCTOR shakes his head at SUE indicating his disapproval of her giving him the letter. NAT finishes and springs to his feet—angrily*).

NAT. The stupid fool! He let Horne pull the wool over his eyes in fine shape.

SUE. (*indignantly*) Nat!

NAT. (*unheedingly*) Oh, if I could only have gone in his place! I knew the kind Horne was. He couldn't have played that trick on me. I'd have forced the secret out of him if I had to—— (*He raises his clenched fist in a gesture of threat like his father's—then lets it fall and sits down again—disgustedly*) But what's the use? And what's the use of this? (*Tosses the letter contemptuously on the table*) He might just as well not have written.

SUE. (*snatching up the letter—deeply hurt*) Aren't you even glad to hear Danny's alive?

NAT. (*turning to her at once—with remorseful confusion*)

Yes—yes—of course, Sue—I don't have to say that, do I? What I mean is, he never found out from Horne—and we're no wiser.

DOCTOR. (*briskly—with a significant glance at SUE*) Well, Susan—Nat—I've got to run along—— (*Meaningly*) I'll be over again tomorrow, Susan.

SUE. Yes, do come. (*Goes with him to the door*) Can you see your way?

DOCTOR. Yes. Good night.

SUE. Good night. (*She closes the door and comes back to*

NAT. *The DOCTOR's footsteps die out*).

NAT. (*savagely*) That damned old fool! What is he doing, sneaking around here all the time? I've grown to hate the sight of him.

SUE. Nat! You can't mean that. Think of how kind he's been.

NAT. Yes—kindness with a purpose.

SUE. Don't be silly. What purpose could he have except wanting to help us?

NAT. To find out things, of course, you simpleton. To pump Pa when he's not responsible for what he's saying.

SUE. (*indignantly*) Nat!

NAT. Much good it's done him! I know Pa. Sane or not, he won't tell *that* to anyone—not even you or me, Sue. (*With sudden fury*) I'm going away—but before I go I'm going to make him tell me! He's been so afraid I'd find out, so scared to speak to me even—locking himself up here. But I'll make him tell—yes, I will!

SUE. Careful, Nat. He'll hear you if you shout like that.

NAT. But we have a right to know—his own children. What if he dies without ever speaking?

SUE. (*uneasily*) Be sensible, Nat. There's nothing to tell except in your imagination. (*Taking his arm—persuasively*) Come on downstairs. I'll get you something to eat. You must be starved, aren't you?

NAT. No—I don't know—I suppose I ought to be. (*He gets to his feet and glances around with a shudder*) What a place for him to build to wait in—like the cabin of a ship sunk deep under the sea—like the Sarah Allen's cabin as it is now, probably. (*With a shiver*) There's a chill comes over you. No wonder he's mad. (*He listens*) Hear him. A year ago today she sailed. I wonder if he knows that. Back and forth, always staring out to sea for the Sarah Allen. Ha-ha! God! It would be funny if it didn't make your flesh creep. (*Brusquely*) Come on. Let's leave him and go down where there's light and warmth. (*They go down the stairs, closing the door behind them. There is a pause. Then the door of the companionway above is heard being opened and shut. A gust of wind sweeps down into the room. BARTLETT stamps down the stairs. The madness which has taken almost complete possession of him in the past year is clearly stamped on his face, particularly in his eyes which seem to stare through and beyond objects with a hunted, haunted expression. His movements suggest an automaton obeying invisible wires. They are quick, jerky, spasmodic. He appears to be laboring under a state of extraordinary excitement. He stands for a second at the foot of the stairs, peering about him suspiciously. Then he goes to the table and sits down on the edge of a chair, his chin supported on his hands*).

BARTLETT. (*takes a folded piece of paper from his pocket and spreads it out on the table in the light of the lantern—pointing with his finger—mumbly*) Where the cross be—ye'll not forget that, Silas Horne. Ye had a copy o' this—no chance for a mistake, bullies—the gold's there, restin' safe—back to me and we'll share it fair and square. A year ago today—ye remember the orders I wrote ye, Horne. (*Threateningly*) Ye'll not be gone more nor a year or I'll—and if ye make port to home here at night, hang a red and a green light at the mainm'st head so I'll see ye comin'. A red and a green—— (*He springs up suddenly and goes to a porthole to look out at the sea—disappointedly*) No lights be there—but they'll come. The year be up today and ye've got to come or I'll—— (*He sinks back on the chair, his head in his hands. Suddenly he starts and stares straight in front of him as if he saw something in the air—with angry defiance*) Aye, there ye be again—the two o' ye! Makin' a mock o' me! Brass and junk, ye say, not worth a damn! Ye don't believe, do ye? I'll show ye! (*He springs to his feet and makes a motion as if grabbing someone by the throat and shaking them—savagely*) Ye lie! Is it gold or no? Answer me! (*With a mocking laugh*) Aye, ye own up to it now, right enough. Too late, ye swabs! No share for ye! (*He sinks back on the chair again—after a pause, dully*) Jimmy's gone. Let them rot. But I spoke no word, Silas Horne, remember! (*Then in a tone of fear*) Be ye dyin', Sarah? No, ye must live—live to see your ship come home with the gold—and I'll buy ye all in the world ye set your heart on. No, not ambergris, Sarah—gold and diamonds and sech! We're rich at last! (*Then with great anguish*) What woman's stubborn talk be this? Confess, ye say? But I

spoke no word, I swear to ye! Why will ye hound me and think evil o' what I done? Men's business, I tell ye. They would have killed us and stolen the gold, can't ye see? (*Wildly*) Enough o' talk, Sarah! I'll sail out in spite o' ye! (*He gets to his feet and paces up and down the room. The door in the rear is opened and NAT reënters. He glances at his father, then looks down the stairs behind him cautiously to see if he is followed. He comes in and closes the door behind him carefully*).

NAT. (*in a low voice*) Pa! (*Then as his father does not appear to notice his presence—louder*) Pa!

BARTLETT. (*stops short and stares at his son as if he were gradually awakening from a dream—slowly*) Be that ye, Nat?

NAT. (*coming forward*) Yes. I want to talk with you.

BARTLETT. (*struggling to bring his thoughts under control*) Talk? Ye want to talk—to me? Men's business—no room for a boy in it—keep clear o' this.

NAT. (*defiantly*) That's what you've always said. But I won't be put off any longer. I won't, do you hear?

BARTLETT. (*angrily*) I've ordered ye not to set foot in this cabin o' mine. Git below where ye belong. Where's Sue? I told her to keep ye away.

NAT. She can't prevent me this time. I've made up my mind. Listen, Pa. I'm going away tomorrow.

BARTLETT. (*uncertainly*) Goin' away?

NAT. Yes, and I'm never coming back. I'm going to start a new life. That's why I want a final talk with you—before I go.

BARTLETT. (*dully*) I've naught to say to ye.

NAT. You will have. Listen. I've absolute proof the Sarah Allen is lost.

BARTLETT. (*fiercely*) Ye lie!

NAT. (*curiously*) Why do you say that? You know it's true. It's just that you *won't believe*.

BARTLETT. (*wanderingly—the word heading his mind into another channel*) Believe? Aye, he wouldn't believe. Brass and junk, he said, not worth a damn—but in the end I made him own up 'twas gold.

NAT. (*repeating the word fascinatedly*) Gold?

BARTLETT. A year ago today she sailed. Ye lie! Ye don't believe either, do ye?—like him. But I'll show ye! I'll make ye own up as I made him! (*With mad exultation*) She's comin' home tonight as I ordered Horne she must! I kin feel her makin' for home, I tell ye! A red an' a green at the mainm'st head if ye make port o' night, I ordered Horne. Ye'll see! (*He goes to look out of a porthole. NAT, as if under a spell, goes to another*).

NAT. (*turning away disappointedly—making an effort to throw off his thoughts—without conviction*) Nonsense. There's nothing there—no lights—and I don't believe there ever will be.

BARTLETT. (*his wild eyes fixed on his son's with an intense effort of will as if he were trying to break down his resistance*) Ye'll see, I tell ye—a red and a green! It ain't time yet, boy, but when it be they'll be plain in the night afore your eyes. (*He goes and sits down by the table. NAT follows him and sits down in the other chair. He sees the map and stares at it fascinatedly*).

NAT. What is this—the map of the island? (*He reaches out his hand for it*).

BARTLETT. (*snatching it up—with a momentary return to reason—frightenedly*) Not for ye, boy. Keep clear o' this for your own good. (*Then with a crazed triumph*) Aye! Ye'd believe this soon enough, wouldn't ye?

NAT. (*intensely*) I've always believed there was something—and a moment ago you mentioned gold. (*Triumphant in his turn*) So you needn't try to hide the secret any longer. I know now. It's gold—gold you found on that island—gold you fitted out the Sarah Allen to sail back for—gold you buried where I saw that cross marked on the map! (*Passionately*) Why have you been afraid to confide in me, your own son? Did you think I wouldn't believe——?

BARTLETT. (*with a mad chuckle*) Aye, ye believe now, right enough.

NAT. I always believed, I tell you. (*Pleadingly*) And now that I know so much why can't you tell me the rest? I must know! I have a right to be heir to the secret. Why don't you confess——

BARTLETT. (*interrupting—his brain catching at the word*) Confess? Confess, did ye say, Sarah? To Nat, did ye mean? Aye, Sarah, I'll tell him all and leave it to him to say if I did wrong. (*His gleaming eyes fixed on his son's*) I'll tell ye, boy, from start to finish o' it. I been eatin' my heart to tell someone—someone who'd believe—someone that'd say I did no wrong. Listen, boy, ye know o' our four days in an open boat after the Triton went down. I told ye o' that when I come home. But what I didn't tell ye was they was six o' us in that boat, not four.

NAT. Six? There were you and Horne and Cates and Jimmy——

BARTLETT. The cook o' the Triton and the ship's boy. We'd been on the island two days—an island barren as hell, mind—without food or drink. We was roasted by the sun and nigh mad with thirst. Then, on the second day, I seed a Malay canoe—a proper war canoe such as the pirates use—sunk down inside the reef. I sent Jimmy down to go over her thinkin' they might be some cask o' water in her the sea'd not got to. (*With impressive emphasis*) He found no water, boy, but he did find—d'ye know what, boy?

NAT. (*exultantly*) The gold, of course!

BARTLETT. (*laughing harshly*) Ha-ha! Ye do believe right enough, don't ye! Aye, the gold—in a chest. We hauled her up ashore and forced the lid open. (*Gloatingly*) And there it was afore our eyes in the sun—gold bracelets and rings and ornaments o' all sorts fixed up fancy with diamonds and emeralds and rubies and sech—red and green—shinin' in the sun! (*He stops impressively*).

NAT. (*fascinatedly*) Diamonds and—— But how did they get there?

BARTLETT. Looted treasure o' some Chinese junk, likely. What matter how it come about? There it was afore our eyes. And then, mind ye, that thief o' a cook came runnin' up from where he'd been shirkin' to look at what we'd found. "No share for ye, ye swab," I yelled at him; and then he says: "It ain't gold—brass and junk," he says and run off for fear o' me. Aye, he run off to the boy and told him to jine with his sneakin' plan to steal the gold from us!

NAT. (*savagely*) But why didn't you stop him? Why didn't you——?

BARTLETT. I be comin' to that boy, and ye'll see if I did

wrong. We carried the chest to the shade o' a palm and there was that thief o' a cook an' the boy waitin'. I collared 'em both and made 'em look at the gold. "Look and tell me if it's gold or no," I says. (*Triumphantly*) They was afeerd to lie. Even that thief o' a cook owned up 'twas gold. Then when I turned 'em loose, because he knowed he'd git no share, he shouted again: "Brass and junk. Not worth a damn."

NAT. (*furiously*) But why did you allow—— Why didn't you——

BARTLETT. (*with mad satisfaction*) Aye, ye be seein' the way o' it, boy. It was just then we sighted the schooner that picked us up after. We made a map and was buryin' the gold when we noticed them two thieves sneakin' about to see where we'd hide it. I saw 'em plain, the scum! That thief o' a cook was thinkin' he'd tell the folks on the schooner and go shares with them—and leave us on the island to rot; or he was thinkin' he and the boy'd be able to come back and dig it up afore I could. We had to do somethin' quick to spile their plan afore the schooner come. (*In a tone of savage satisfaction*), And so—though I spoke no word to him—Jimmy knifed 'em both and covered 'em up with sand. But I spoke no word, d'ye hear? Their deaths be on Jimmy's head alone.

NAT. (*passionately*) And what if you had? They deserved what they got.

BARTLETT. Then ye think I did no wrong?

NAT. No! Any man—I'd have done the same myself.

BARTLETT. (*gripping his son's hand tensely*) Ye be true son o' mine, Nat. I ought to told ye before. (*Exultantly*) Ye hear, Sarah? Nat says I done no wrong.

NAT. The map! Can I see it?

BARTLETT. Aye. (*He hands it to NAT who spreads it out on the table and pores over it*).

NAT. (*excitedly*) Why, with this I—we—can go back—even if the Sarah Allen is lost.

BARTLETT. She ain't lost, boy—not her. Don't heed them lies ye been hearin'. She's due now. I'll go up and look. (*He goes up the companionway stairs. NAT does not seem to notice his going, absorbed in the map. Then there is a loud muffled hail in BARTLETT's voice*) "Sarah Allen, ahoy!" (*NAT starts, transfixed—then rushes to one of the portholes to look. He turns back, passing his hand over his eyes, frowning bewilderedly. The door above is flung open and slammed shut and BARTLETT stamps down the stairs*).

BARTLETT. (*fixing NAT hypnotically with his eyes—triumphantly*) What did I tell ye? D'ye believe now she'll come back? D'ye credit your own eyes?

NAT. (*vaguely*) Eyes? I looked. I didn't see——

BARTLETT. Ye lie! The Sarah Allen, ye blind fool, come back from the Southern Seas as I swore she must! Loaded with gold as I swore she would be!—makin' port!—droppin' her anchor just when I hailed her.

NAT. (*feebly, his will crumbling*) But—how do you know?—some other schooner——

BARTLETT. Not know my own ship—and the signal I'd ordered Horne to make!

NAT. (*mechanically*) I know—a red and a green at the mainm'st head.

BARTLETT. Then look out if ye dare! (*He goes to a porthole*) Ye kin see it plain from here. (*Commandingly*) Will ye believe your eyes? Look! (*NAT comes to him slowly—*

looks through the porthole—and starts back, a possessed expression coming over his face).

NAT. (*slowly*) A red and a green—clear as day!

BARTLETT. (*his face is now transfigured by the ecstasy of a dream come true*) They've lowered a boat—the three—Horne an' Cates and Jimmy Kanaka. They're rowin' ashore. Listen. I hear the oars in the locks. Listen!

NAT. (*staring into his father's eyes—after a pause during which he appears to be straining his hearing to the breaking point—excitedly*) I hear!

BARTLETT. Listen! They've landed. They'll be comin' up the path now. (*In a crooning, monotonous tone*) They move slowly—slowly. It be heavy, I know—that chest. (*After a pause*) Hark! They're below at the door in front.

NAT. I hear!

BARTLETT. Ye'll see it now in a moment, boy—the gold. Up with it, bullies! Up ye come! Up, bullies! It's heavy, heavy!

NAT. (*madly*) I hear them! They're on the floor below! They're coming! I'll open the door. (*He springs to the door and flings it open, shouting*) Welcome home, boys! (*SUE is discovered outside just climbing up the stairs from below. She steps inside, then stops, looking with amazement and horror from father to brother. NAT pushes her roughly aside to look behind her down the stairs.*)

SUE. Nat!

NAT. (*turning to his father*) I'll go down to the wharf. They must be there or—— (*The rest of his words are lost as he hurries down the stairs. BARTLETT steps back, shrinking away from his daughter, and sinks on a chair by the table with a groan, his hands over his eyes.*)

SUE. (*comes to him and shakes him by the shoulder—alarmed*) Pa! What has happened? What is the matter with Nat? What have you told him? (*With bitter despair*) Oh, can't you see you're driving him mad, too?

BARTLETT. (*letting his hands fall and staring at her haggardly—falteringly, as if reason were slowly filtering back into his brain*) Sue—ye said—drivin' him mad, too! Then ye think I be——? (*He staggers to his feet. SUE breaks down, sobbing. BARTLETT falters on*) But I seen her—the Sarah Allen—the signal lights——

SUE. Oh, Pa, there's nothing there! You know it! She was lost months ago.

BARTLETT. Lost? (*He stumbles over to a porthole and looks out. His body sags as if he were going to fall. He turns away and cries hopelessly in a tone of heart-rending grief*) Lost! Aye, they be no Sarah Allen there—no lights—nothin'!

SUE. (*pleading fiercely*) Pa, you've got to save Nat! He won't heed anyone else. Can't you tell him the truth—the whole truth whatever it is—now when I'm here and you're yourself again—and set him free from this crazy dream!

BARTLETT. (*with wild grief*) Confess, ye mean? Sue, ye be houndin' me like your Ma did to her dyin' hour! Confess—that I spoke the word to Jimmy—in my mind! Confess—brass and junk—not worth a damn! (*In frenzied protest*) No! Ye lie!

SUE. Oh, Pa, I don't know what you mean. Tell Nat the truth! Save him!

BARTLETT. The truth? It's a lie! (*As SUE tries to bar his way to the companionway—sternly*) Out o' my way, girl! (*He pulls himself feebly up the stairs. The door is heard slamming*

above. SUE sits down in a chair in a hopeless, exhausted attitude. After a pause NAT reënters. He is panting heavily from his exertions. His pale face is set in an expression of despair).

NAT. (*looking about the room wildly*) Where is he? Sue! (*He comes forward and falls on his knees besides her chair, hiding his face in her lap like a frightened child. He sobs hoarsely*) Sue! What does it all mean? I looked. There was nothing there—no schooner—nothing.

SUE. (*soothing him as if he were a little boy*) Of course there wasn't. Did you expect there would be, you foolish boy? Come, you know better than that. Why, Nat, you told the doctor and I that you were absolutely convinced the Sarah Allen was lost.

NAT. (*dully*) Yes, I know—but I don't believe—like him——

SUE. Sshhhh! You know the state Pa is in. He doesn't realize what he's saying half the time. You ought to have better sense than to pay any attention——

NAT. (*excitedly*) But he told me all he's been hiding from us—all about the gold!

SUE. (*looking at him with alarm—mystified*) Gold? (*Then forcing a smile*) Don't be silly, Nat. It doesn't exist except in his poor, deranged mind.

NAT. (*fiercely*) That's a lie, Sue! I saw the map, I tell you—the map of the island with a cross marked on it where they buried the gold.

SUE. He showed a map to you—a real map? (*Gently*) Are you sure you're not just imagining that, too?

NAT. I had it in my hands, you fool, you! There—on the

table. (*He springs to his feet, sees the map on the table, and snatches it up with an exclamation of joy—showing it to SUE*) See! Now will you believe me! (*She examines the map perplexedly. NAT paces up and down—excitedly*) I tell you it's all true. You can't deny it now. It's lucky for us I forced him to confess. He might have died keeping the secret and then we'd have lost—I'll tell you what I'm going to do now, Sue. I'm going to raise the money somewhere, somehow, and fit out another schooner and this time I'll sail on her myself. No trusting to Danny or anyone else! Yes, Sue, we'll come into our own yet, even if the Sarah Allen is lost—— (*He stops—then in accents of bewildered fear*) But—she can't be lost—I saw the lights, Sue—as plain as I see you now—— (*He goes to one of the portholes again*).

SUE. (*who has been watching him worriedly, puts the map back on the table, gets up and, assuming a brisk, matter-of-fact tone, she goes over and takes him by the arm*) Come downstairs, Nat. Don't think any more about it tonight. It's late and you're worn out. You need rest and a good sleep.

NAT. (*following her toward the door—confusedly*) But Sue—I saw them—— (*From above in the night comes the muffled hail in BARTLETT'S voice*) Sarah Allen, ahoy! (*NAT stops, tortured, his hands instinctively raised up to cover his ears. SUE gives a startled cry. The door above is slammed and BARTLETT comes down the stairs, his face revealing that the delusion has again full possession of his mind*).

BARTLETT. (*pointing his finger at his son and fixing him with his eyes—in ringing, triumphant tones*) The Sarah Allen, boy—in the harbor below! Come back from the Southern Seas as I swore she must! Loaded with gold as I swore

she would be! (*NAT again seems to crumble—to give way to the stronger will. He takes a step toward his father, his eyes lighting up. SUE looks at his face—then rushes to her father.*)

SUE. (*putting her hands to her father's head and forcing him to look down into her face—intensely*) Pa! Stop, do you hear me! It's all mad! You're driving Nat mad, too! (*As she sees her father hesitate, the wild light dying out of his eyes, she summons all her power to a fierce pleading*) For my sake, Pa! For Ma's sake! Think of how she would feel if she were alive and saw you acting this way with Nat! Tell him! Tell him now—before me—tell him it's all a lie!

BARTLETT. (*trying in an agony of conflict to get hold of his reason—incoherently*) Yes, Sue—I hear ye—confess—aye, Sarah, your dyin' words—keep Nat clear o' this—but—red and green—I seen 'em plain—— (*Then suddenly after a tremendous struggle, lifting his tortured face to NAT'S—in tones of despair*) Nothin' there, boy! Don't ye believe! No red and green! She'll never come! Derelict and lost, boy, the Sarah Allen. (*After another struggle with himself*) And I lied to ye, boy. I gave the word—in my mind—to kill them two. I murdered 'em in cold blood.

SUE. (*shrinking from him in horror*) Pa! You don't know what you're saying.

BARTLETT. The truth, girl. Ye said—confess——

NAT. (*bewilderedly*) But—it was right. They were trying to steal——

BARTLETT. (*overcome by the old obsession for a moment—savagely*) Aye, that's it! The thievin' scum! They was tryin' —— (*He stops short, throwing his head back, his whole body tense and quivering with the effort he makes to force this sus-*

taining lie out of his brain—then, broken but self-conquering, he looks again at NAT—gently) No, Nat. That be the lie I been tellin' myself ever since. That cook—he said 'twas brass—— But I'd been lookin' for ambergris—gold—the whole o' my life—and when we found that chest—I *had* to believe, I tell ye! I'd been dreamin' o' it all my days! But he said brass and junk, and told the boy—and I give the word to murder 'em both and cover 'em up with sand.

NAT. (*very pale—despairingly*) But he lied, didn't he? It is gold—real gold—isn't it?

BARTLETT. (*slowly takes the studded anklet from his pocket and holds it out to NAT. The latter brings it to the light of the lantern. BARTLETT sits on a chair, covering his face with his hands—in a tone of terrible suffering*) Ye'll tell me, boy—if it's gold or no. I've had it by me all this time—but I've been afeerd to show——

NAT. (*in a tone of wild scorn*) Why, it's brass, of course! The cheapest kind of junk—not worth a damn! (*He flings it savagely into a corner of the room. BARTLETT groans and seems to shrink up and turn into a figure of pitiable feebleness*).

SUE. (*pityingly*) Don't, Nat. (*She puts her arms around her father's shoulders protectingly*).

NAT. (*in a stifled voice*) What a damned fool I've been! (*He flings himself down on the cot, his shoulders heaving*).

BARTLETT. (*uncovers his gray face on which there is now settling an expression of strange peace—stroking his daughter's hand*) Sue—don't think hard o' me. (*He takes the map*) An end to this! (*He slowly tears it into small pieces, seeming to grow weaker and weaker as he does so. Finally as he lets the fragments filter through his fingers, his whole frame suddenly*

relaxes. He sighs, his eyes shut, and sags back in his chair, his head bent forward limply on his chest).

SUE. (*alarmed*) Pa! (*She sinks to her knees beside him and looks up into his face*) Pa! Speak to me! It's Sue! (*Then turning toward her brother—terrifiedly*) Nat! Run—get the doctor—— (NAT *starts to a sitting position. SUE tries with trembling hands to feel of her father's pulse, his heart—then begins to sob hysterically*) Oh, Nat—he's dead, I think—he's dead!

(The Curtain Falls)

"THE FIRST MAN"

A Play in Four Acts

(1921)

CHARACTERS

CURTIS JAYSON

MARTHA, *his wife*

JOHN JAYSON, *his father, a banker*

JOHN, JR., *his brother*

RICHARD, *his brother*

ESTHER (MRS. MARK SHEFFIELD), *his sister*

LILY, *his sister*

MRS. DAVIDSON, *his father's aunt*

MARK SHEFFIELD, *a lawyer*

EMILY, JOHN JR.'s *wife*

RICHARD BIGELOW

A MAID

A TRAINED NURSE

SCENES

ACT I

Living-room in the house of CURTIS JAYSON, Bridgetown, Conn.
—an afternoon in early Fall.

ACT II

CURTIS' study—morning of the following day.

ACT III

The same—three o'clock in the morning of a day in early spring
of the next year.

ACT IV

Same as Act I—three days later.

"THE FIRST MAN"

ACT ONE

SCENE. *Living-room of CURTIS JAYSON's house in Bridgetown, Conn.*

A large, comfortable room. On the left, an armchair, a big open fireplace, a writing desk with chair in far left corner. On this side there is also a door leading into CURTIS' study. In the rear, center, a double doorway opening on the hall and the entryway. Bookcases are built into the wall on both sides of this doorway. In the far right corner, a grand piano. Three large windows looking out on the lawn, and another armchair, front, are on this right side of the room. Opposite the fireplace is a couch, facing front. Opposite the windows on the right is a long table with magazines, reading lamp, etc. Four chairs are grouped about the table. The walls and ceiling are in a French gray color. A great rug covers most of the hardwood floor.

It is around four o'clock of a fine afternoon in early fall.

As the curtain rises, MARTHA, CURTIS and BIGELOW are discovered. MARTHA is a healthy, fine-looking woman of thirty-eight. She does not appear this age for her strenuous life in the open has kept her young and fresh. She possesses the frank, clear, direct quality of outdoors, outspoken and generous. Her wavy hair is a dark brown, her eyes blue-gray. CURTIS JAYSON is a tall, rangy, broad-shouldered man of thirty-seven. While spare his figure has an appearance of rugged health, of great nervous strength held in reserve. His square-jawed, large-fea-

tured face retains an eager boyish enthusiasm in spite of its prevailing expression of thoughtful, preoccupied aloofness. His crisp dark hair is graying at the temples. EDWARD BIGELOW is a large, handsome man of thirty-nine. His face shows culture and tolerance, a sense of humor, a lazy unambitious contentment. CURTIS is reading an article in some scientific periodical, seated by the table. MARTHA and BIGELOW are sitting nearby, laughing and chatting.

BIGELOW. (*is talking with a comically worried but earnest air*) Do you know, I'm getting so I'm actually afraid to leave them alone with that governess. She's too romantic. I'll wager she's got a whole book full of ghost stories, superstitions, and yellow-journal horrors up her sleeve.

MARTHA. Oh, pooh! Don't go milling around for trouble. When I was a kid I used to get fun out of my horrors.

BIGELOW. But I imagine you were more courageous than most of us.

MARTHA. Why?

BIGELOW. Well, Nevada—the Far West at that time—I should think a child would have grown so accustomed to violent scenes——

MARTHA. (*smiling*) Oh, in the mining camps; but you don't suppose my father lugged me along on his prospecting trips, do you? Why, I never saw any rough scenes until I'd finished with school and went to live with father in Goldfield.

BIGELOW. (*smiling*) And then you met Curt.

MARTHA. Yes—but I didn't mean he was a rough scene. He was very mild even in those days. Do tell me what he was like at Cornell.

BIGELOW. A romanticist—and he still is!

MARTHA. (*pointing at CURTIS with gay mischief*) What! That sedate man! Never!

CURTIS. (*looking up and smiling at them both affectionately—lazily*) Don't mind him, Martha. He always was crazy.

BIGELOW. (*to CURT—accusingly*) Why did you elect to take up mining engineering at Cornell instead of a classical degree at the Yale of your fathers and brothers? Because you had been reading Bret Harte in prep. school and mistaken him for a modern realist. You devoted four years to grooming yourself for another outcast of Poker Flat. (*MARTHA laughs*).

CURTIS. (*grinning*) It was you who were hypnotized by Harte—so much so that his West of the past is still your blinded New England-movie idea of the West at present. But go on. What next?

BIGELOW. Next? You get a job as engineer in that Goldfield mine—but you are soon disillusioned by a laborious life where six-shooters are as rare as nuggets. You try prospecting. You find nothing but different varieties of pebbles. But it is necessary to your nature to project romance into these stones, so you go in strong for geology. As a geologist, you become a slave to the Romance of the Rocks. It is but a step from that to anthropology—the last romance of all. There you find yourself—because there is no further to go. You win fame as the most proficient of young skull-hunters—and wander over the face of the globe, digging up bones like an old dog.

CURTIS. (*with a laugh*) The man is mad, Martha.

BIGELOW. Mad! What an accusation to come from one who is even now considering setting forth on a five-year excavating contest in search of the remains of our gibbering ancestor, the First Man!

CURTIS. (*with sudden seriousness*) I'm not considering it any longer. I've decided to go.

MARTHA. (*starting—the hurt showing in her voice*). When did you decide?

CURTIS. I only really came to a decision this morning. (*With a seriousness that forces BIGELOW's interested attention*) It's a case of got to go. It's a tremendous opportunity that it would be a crime for me to neglect.

BIGELOW. And a big honor, too, isn't it, to be picked as a member of such a large affair?

CURTIS. (*with a smile*) I guess it's just that they want all the men with considerable practical experience they can get. There are bound to be hardships and they know I'm hardened to them. (*Turning to his wife with an affectionate smile*) We haven't roughed it in the queer corners for the last ten years without knowing how it's done, have we, Martha?

MARTHA. (*dully*) No, Curt.

CURTIS. (*with an earnest enthusiasm*) And this expedition is what you call a large affair, Big. It's the largest thing of its kind ever undertaken. The possibilities, from the standpoint of anthropology, are limitless.

BIGELOW. (*with a grin*) Aha! Now we come to the Missing Link!

CURTIS. (*frowning*) Darn your Barnum and Bailey circus lingo, Big. This isn't a thing to mock at. I should think the origin of man would be something that would appeal even to your hothouse imagination. Modern science believes—knows—that Asia was the first home of the human race. That's where we're going, to the great Central Asian plateau north of the Himalayas.

BIGELOW. (*more soberly*) And there you hope to dig up—our first ancestor?

CURTIS. It's a chance in a million, but I believe we may, myself—at least find authentic traces of him so that we can reconstruct his life and habits. I was up in that country a lot while I was mining advisor to the Chinese government—did some of my own work on the side. The extraordinary results I obtained with the little means at my disposal convinced me of the riches yet to be uncovered. The First Man may be among them.

BIGELOW. (*turning to MARTHA*) And you were with him on that Asian plateau?

MARTHA. Yes, I've always been with him.

CURTIS. You bet she has. (*He goes over and puts his hand on his wife's shoulder affectionately*) Martha's more efficient than a whole staff of assistants and secretaries. She knows more about what I'm doing than I do half the time. (*He turns toward his study*) Well, I guess I'll go in and work some.

MARTHA. (*quietly*) Do you need me now, Curt?

BIGELOW. (*starting up*) Yes, if you two want to work together, why just shoo me—

CURTIS. (*puts both hands on his shoulders and forces him to his seat again*) No. Sit down, Big. I don't need Martha now. (*Coming over to her, bends down and kisses her—rather mockingly*) I couldn't deprive Big of an audience for his confessions of a fond parent.

BIGELOW. Aha! Now it's you who are mocking at something you know nothing about. (*An awkward silence follows this remark*).

CURTIS. (*frowning*) I guess you're forgetting, aren't you,

Big? (*He turns and walks into his study, closing the door gently behind him*).

MARTHA. (*after a pause—sadly*) Poor Curt.

BIGELOW. (*ashamed and confused*) I had forgotten——

MARTHA. The years have made me reconciled. They haven't Curt. (*She sighs—then turns to BIGELOW with a forced smile*) I suppose it's hard for any of you back here to realize that Curt and I ever had any children.

BIGELOW. (*after a pause*) How old were they when——?

MARTHA. Three years and two—both girls. (*She goes on sadly*) We had a nice little house in Goldfield. (*Forcing a smile*) We were very respectable home folks then. The wandering came later, after—It was a Sunday in winter when Curt and I had gone visiting some friends. The nurse girl fell asleep—or something—and the children sneaked out in their underclothes and played in the snow. Pneumonia set in—and a week later they were both dead.

BIGELOW. (*shocked*) Good heavens!

MARTHA. We were real lunatics for a time. And then when we'd calmed down enough to realize—how things stood with us—we swore we'd never have children again—to steal away their memory. It wasn't what you thought—romanticism—that set Curt wandering—and me with him. It was a longing to lose ourselves—to forget. He flung himself with all his power into every new study that interested him. He couldn't keep still, mentally or bodily—and I followed. He needed me—then—so dreadfully!

BIGELOW. And is it that keeps driving him on now?

MARTHA. Oh, no. He's found himself. His work has taken the place of the children.

BIGELOW. And with you, too?

MARTHA. (*with a wan smile*) Well, I've helped—all I could. His work has me in it, I like to think—and I have him.

BIGELOW. (*shaking his head*) I think people are foolish to stand by such an oath as you took—forever. (*With a smile*) Children are a great comfort in one's old age, I've tritely found.

MARTHA. (*smiling*) Old age!

BIGELOW. I'm knocking at the door of fatal forty.

MARTHA. (*with forced gayety*) You're not very tactful, I must say. Don't you know I'm thirty-eight?

BIGELOW. (*gallantly*) A woman is as old as she looks. You're not thirty yet.

MARTHA. (*laughing*) After that nice remark I'll have to forgive you everything, won't I? (*LILY JAYSON comes in from the rear. She is a slender, rather pretty girl of twenty-five. The stamp of college student is still very much about her. She rather insists on a superior, intellectual air, is full of nervous, thwarted energy. At the sight of them sitting on the couch together, her eyebrows are raised*).

LILY. (*coming into the room—breezily*) Hello, Martha. Hello, Big. (*They both get up with answering "Hellos"*) I walked right in regardless. Hope I'm not interrupting.

MARTHA. Not at all.

LILY. (*sitting down by the table as MARTHA and BIGELOW resume their seats on the lounge*) I must say it sounded serious. I heard you tell Bill you'd forgive him everything, Martha. (*Dryly—with a mocking glance at BIGELOW*) You're letting yourself in for a large proposition.

BIGELOW. (*displeased but trying to smile it off*) The past is never past for a dog with a bad name, eh, Lily? (*LILY*

laughs. BIGELOW *gets up*) If you want to reward me for my truthfulness, Mrs. Jayson, help me take the kids for an airing in the car. I know it's an imposition but they've grown to expect you. (*Glancing at his watch*) By Jove, I'll have to run along. I'll get them and then pick you up here. Is that all right?

MARTHA. Fine.

BIGELOW. I'll run, then. Good-by, Lily. (*She nods.* BIGELOW *goes out rear*).

MARTHA. (*cordially*) Come on over here, Lily.

LILY. (*sits on couch with MARTHA—after a pause—with a smile*) You were forgetting, weren't you?

MARTHA. What?

LILY. That you'd invited all the family over here to tea this afternoon. I'm the advance guard.

MARTHA. (*embarrassed*) So I was! How stupid!

LILY. (*with an inquisitive glance at MARTHA's face but with studied carelessness*) Do you like Bigelow?

MARTHA. Yes, very much. And Curt thinks the world of him.

LILY. Oh, Curt is the last one to be bothered by anyone's morals. Curt and I are the unconventional ones of the family. The trouble with Bigelow, Martha, is that he was too careless to conceal his sins—and that won't go down in this Philistine small town. You have to hide and be a fellow hypocrite or they revenge themselves on you. Bigelow didn't. He flaunted his love-affairs in everyone's face. I used to admire him for it. No one exactly blamed him, in their secret hearts. His wife was a terrible, strait-laced creature. No man could have endured her. (*Disgustedly*) After her death he suddenly

acquired a bad conscience. He'd never noticed the children before. I'll bet he didn't even know their names. And then, presto, he's about in our midst giving an imitation of a wet hen with a brood of ducks. It's a bore, if you ask me.

MARTHA. (*flushing*) I think it's very fine of him.

LILY. (*shaking her head*) His reform is too sudden. He's joined the hypocrites, I think.

MARTHA. I'm sure he's no hypocrite. When you see him with the children——

LILY. Oh, I know he's a good actor. Lots of women have been in love with him. (*Then suddenly*) You won't be furious if I'm very, very frank, will you, Martha?

MARTHA. (*surprised*) No, of course not, Lily.

LILY. Well, I'm the bearer of a message from the Jayson family.

MARTHA. (*astonished*) A message? For me?

LILY. Don't think that I have anything to do with it. I'm only a Victor record of their misgivings. Shall I switch it going? Well, then, father thinks, brother John and wife, sister Esther and husband all think that you are unwisely intimate with this same Bigelow.

MARTHA. (*stunned*) I? Unwisely intimate—? (*Suddenly laughing with amusement*) Well, you sure are funny people!

LILY—No, we're not funny. We'd be all right if we were. On the contrary, we're very dull and deadily. Bigelow really has a villainous rep. for philandering. But, of course, you didn't know that.

MARTHA. (*beginning to feel resentful—coldly*) No, I didn't and I don't care to know it now.

LILY. (*calmly*) I told them you wouldn't relish their silly

advice. (*In a very confidential, friendly tone*) Oh, I hate their narrow small-town ethics as much as you do, Martha. I sympathize with you, indeed I do. But I have to live with them and so, for comfort's sake, I've had to make compromises. And you're going to live in our midst from now on, aren't you? Well then, you'll have to make compromises, too—if you want any peace.

MARTHA. But—compromises about what? (*Forcing a laugh*) I refuse to take it seriously. How anyone could think—it's too absurd.

LILY. What set them going was Big's being around such an awful lot the weeks Curt was in New York, just after you'd settled down here. You must acknowledge he was—very much present then, Martha.

MARTHA. But it was on account of his children. They were always with him.

LILY. The town doesn't trust this sudden fond parenthood, Martha. We've known him too long, you see.

MARTHA. But he's Curt's oldest and best friend.

LILY. We've found they always are.

MARTHA. (*springing to her feet—indignantly*) It's a case of evil minds, it seems to me—and it would be extremely insulting if I didn't have a sense of humor. (*Resentfully*) You can tell your family, that as far as I'm concerned, the town may——

LILY. Go to the devil. I knew you'd say that. Well, fight the good fight. You have all my best wishes. (*With a sigh*) I wish I had something worth fighting for. Now that I'm through with college, my occupation's gone. All I do is read

book after book. The only live people are the ones in books, I find, and the only live life.

MARTHA. (*immediately sympathetic*) You're lonely, that's what, Lily.

LILY. (*dryly*) Don't pity me, Martha—or I'll join the enemy.

MARTHA. I'm not. But I'd like to help you if I could. (*After a pause*) Have you ever thought of marrying?

LILY. (*with a laugh*) Martha! How banal! The men I see are enough to banish that thought if I ever had it.

MARTHA. Marriage isn't only the man. It's children. Wouldn't you like to have children?

LILY. (*turning to her bluntly*) Wouldn't you?

MARTHA. (*confused*) But—Lily——

LILY. Oh, I know it wasn't practicable as long as you elected to wander with Curt—but why not now when you've definitely settled down here? I think that would solve things all round. If you could present Father with a grandson, I'm sure he'd fall on your neck. He feels piqued at the John and Esther families because they've had a run of girls. A male Jayson! Aunt Davidson would weep with joy. (*Suddenly*) You're thirty-eight, aren't you, Martha?

MARTHA. Yes.

LILY. Then why don't you—before it's too late? (MARTHA, *struggling with herself, does not answer. LILY goes on slowly*) You won't want to tag along with Curt to the ends of the earth forever, will you? (*Curiously*) Wasn't that queer life like any other? I mean, didn't it get to pall on you?

MARTHA. (*as if confessing it reluctantly*) Yes—perhaps—in the last two years.

LILY. (*decisively*) It's time for both of you to rest on your

laurels. Why can't Curt keep on with what he's doing now—stay home and write his books?

MARTHA. Curt isn't that kind. The actual work—the romance of it—that's his life.

LILY. But if he goes and you have to stay, you'll be lonesome—(*meaningly*) alone.

MARTHA. Horribly. I don't know what I'll do.

LILY. Then why—why? Think, Martha. If Curt knew—that was to happen—he'd want to stay here with you. I'm sure he would.

MARTHA. (*shaking her head sadly*) No. Curt has grown to dislike children. They remind him of—ours that were taken. He adored them so. He's never become reconciled.

LILY. If you confronted Curt with the actual fact, he'd be reconciled soon enough, and happy in the bargain.

MARTHA. (*eagerly*) Do you really think so?

LILY. And you, Martha—I can tell from the way you've talked that you'd like to.

MARTHA. (*excitedly*) Yes, I—I never thought I'd ever want to again. For many years after they died I never once dreamed of it— But lately—the last years—I've felt—and when we came to live here—and I saw all around me—homes—and children, I—— (*She hesitates as if ashamed at having confessed so much*).

LILY. (*putting an arm around her—affectionately*) I know. (*Vigorously*) You must, that's all there is to it! If you want my advice, you go right ahead and don't tell Curt until it's a fact he'll have to learn to like, willy-nilly. You'll find, in his inmost heart, he'll be tickled to death.

MARTHA. (*forcing a smile*) Yes, I—I'll confess I thought

of that. In spite of my fear, I—I've—I mean—I—— (*She flushes in a shamed confusion*).

LILY. (*looking at her searchingly*) Why, Martha, what— (*Then suddenly understanding—with excited pleasure*) Martha! I know! It is so, isn't it? It is!

MARTHA. (*in a whisper*) Yes.

LILY. (*kissing her affectionately*) You dear, you! (*Then after a pause*) How long have you known?

MARTHA. For over two months. (*There is a ring from the front door bell in the hall*).

LILY. (*jumping up*) I'll bet that's we Jaysons now. (*She runs to the door in the rear and looks down the hall to the right*) Yes, it's Esther and husband and Aunt Davidson. (*She comes back to MARTHA laughing excitedly. The MAID is seen going to the door*) The first wave of attack, Martha! Be brave! The Young Guard dies but never surrenders!

MARTHA. (*displeased but forcing a smile*) You make me feel terribly ill at ease when you put it that way, Lily. (*She rises now and goes to greet the visitors, who enter. MRS. DAVIDSON is seventy-five years old—a thin, sinewy old lady, old-fashioned, unbending and rigorous in manner. She is dressed aggressively in the fashion of a bygone age. ESTHER is a stout, middle-aged woman with the round, unmarked, sentimentally-contented face of one who lives unthinkingly from day to day, sheltered in an assured position in her little world. MARK, her husband, is a lean, tall, stooping man of about forty-five. His long face is alert, shrewd, cautious, full of the superficial craftiness of the lawyer mind. MARTHA kisses the two women, shakes hands with MARK, uttering the usual meaningless greetings in a forced tone. They reply in much the same spirit. There is the buzz of this empty chatter while MARTHA gets them seated. LILY*

stands looking on with a cynical smile of amusement. MRS. DAVIDSON *is in the chair at the end of table, left, ESTHER sits by MARTHA on couch, MARK in chair at front of table*) Will you have tea now or shall we wait for the others?

ESTHER. Let's wait. They ought to be here any moment.

LILY. (*maliciously*) Just think, Martha had forgotten you were coming. She was going motoring with Bigelow. (*There is a dead silence at this—broken diplomatically by SHEFFIELD*).

SHEFFIELD. Where is Curt, Martha?

MARTHA. Hard at work in his study. I'm afraid he's there for the day.

SHEFFIELD. (*condescendingly*) Still plugging away at his book, I suppose. Well, I hope it will be a big success.

LILY. (*irritated by his smugness*) As big a success as the brief you're writing to restrain the citizens from preventing the Traction Company robbing them, eh, Mark? (*Before anyone can reply, she turns suddenly on her aunt who is sitting rigidly on her chair, staring before her stonily like some old lady in a daguerreotype—in a loud challenging tone*) You don't mind if I smoke, Aunt? (*She takes a cigarette out of case and lights it*).

ESTHER. (*smiling*) Lily!

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*fixes LILY with her stare—in a tone of irrevocable decision*) We'll get you married, young lady, and that very soon. What you need to bring you down to earth is a husband and the responsibility of children. (*Turning her glance to MARTHA, a challenge in her question*) Every woman who is able should have children. Don't you believe that, Martha Jayson? (*She accentuates the full name*).

MARTHA. (*taken aback for a moment but restraining her resentment—gently*) Yes, I do, Mrs. Davidson.

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*seemingly placated by this reply—in a*

milder tone) You must call me aunt, my dear. (*Meaningly*) All the Jaysons do.

MARTHA. (*simply*) Thank you, Aunt.

LILY. (*as if all of this aroused her irritation—in a nervous fuming*) Why don't the others come, darn 'em? I'm dying for my tea. (*The door from the study is opened and CURT appears. They all greet him*).

CURTIS. (*absent-mindedly*) Hello, everybody. (*Then with a preoccupied air to MARTHA*) Martha, I don't want to interrupt you—but——

MARTHA. (*getting up briskly*) You want my help?

CURTIS. (*with the same absent-minded air*) Yes—not for long—just a few notes before I forget them. (*He goes back into the study*).

MARTHA. (*seemingly relieved by this interruption and glad of the chance it gives to show them her importance to CURT*) You'll excuse me for a few moments, all of you, won't you? (*They all nod*).

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*rather harshly*) Why doesn't Curt hire a secretary? That is no work for his wife.

MARTHA. (*quietly*) A paid secretary could hardly give the sympathy and understanding Curt needs, Mrs. Davidson. (*Proudly*) And she would have to study for years, as I have done, in order to take my place. (*To LILY*) If I am not here by the time the others arrive, will you see about the tea, Lily——?

LILY. (*eagerly*) Sure. I love to serve drinks. If I were a man, I'd be a bartender—in Mexico or Canada.

MARTHA. (*going toward the study*) I'll be with you again in a minute, I hope. (*She goes in and shuts the door behind her*).

ESTHER. (*pettishly*) Even people touched by a smattering of science seem to get rude, don't they?

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*harshly*) I have heard much silly talk of this being an age of free women, and I have always said it was tommyrot. (*Pointing to the study*) She is an example. She is more of a slave to Curt's hobbies than any of my generation were to anything but their children. (*Still more harshly*) Where are her children?

LILY. They died, Aunt, as children have a bad habit of doing. (*Then, meaningly*) However, I wouldn't despair if I were you. (*MRS. DAVIDSON stares at her fixedly.*)

ESTHER. (*betraying a sudden frightened jealousy*) What do you mean, Lily? What are you so mysterious about? What did she say? What——?

LILY. (*mockingly*) Mark, your frau seems to have me on the stand. Can I refuse to answer? (*There is a ring at the bell. LILY jumps to her feet excitedly*) Here comes the rest of our Grand Fleet. Now I'll have my tea. (*She darts out to the hallway*).

ESTHER. (*shaking her head*) Goodness, Lily is trying on the nerves. (*JAYSON, his two sons, JOHN and DICK, and JOHN's wife, EMILY, enter from hallway in rear. JAYSON, the father, is a short, stout bald-headed man of sixty. A typical, small-town, New England best-family banker, reserved in pose, unobtrusively important—a placid exterior hiding querulousness and a fussy temper. JOHN JUNIOR is his father over again in appearance, but pompous, obtrusive, purse-and-family-proud, extremely irritating in his self-complacent air of authority, emptily assertive and loud. He is about forty. RICHARD, the other brother, is a typical young Casino and country club member, college-bred, good-looking, not unlikable. He has been an officer in the*

war and has not forgotten it. EMILY, JOHN JR.'s wife, is one of those small, mouse-like women who conceal beneath an outward aspect of gentle, unprotected innocence a very active envy, a silly pride, and a mean malice. The people in the room with the exception of MRS. DAVIDSON rise to greet them. All exchange familiar, perfunctory greetings. SHEFFIELD relinquishes his seat in front of the table to JAYSON, going to the chair, right front, himself. JOHN and DICK take the two chairs to the rear of table. EMILY joins ESTHER on the couch and they whisper together excitedly, ESTHER doing most of the talking. The men remain in uncomfortable silence for a moment).

DICK. (*with gay mockery*) Well, the gang's all here. Looks like the League of Nations. (*Then with impatience*) Let's get down to cases, folks. I want to know why I've been summoned here. I'm due for tournament mixed-doubles at the Casino at five. Where's the tea—and has Curt a stick in the cellar to put in it?

LILY. (*appearing in the doorway*) Here's tea—but no stick for you, sot. (*The MAID brings in tray with tea things*).

JOHN. (*heavily*) It seems it would be more to the point to inquire where our hostess——

JAYSON. (*rousing himself again*) Yes. And where is Curt?

LILY. Working at his book. He called Martha to take notes on something.

ESTHER. (*with a trace of resentment*) She left us as if she were glad of the excuse.

LILY. Stuff, Esther! She knows how much Curt depends on her—and we don't.

EMILY. (*in her quiet, lisping voice—with the most innocent air*) Martha seems to be a model wife. (*But there is some qual-*

ity to the way she says it that makes them all stare at her uneasily).

LILY. (*insultingly*) How well you say what you don't mean, Emily! Twinkle, twinkle, little bat! But I'm forgetting to do the honors. Tea, everybody? (*Without waiting for any answer*) Tea, everybody! (*The tea is served*).

JAYSON. (*impatiently*) Stop fooling, Lily. Let's get to our muttons. Did you talk with Martha?

LILY. (*briskly*) I did, sir.

JAYSON. (*in a lowered voice*) What did she say?

LILY. She said you could all go to the devil! (*They all look shocked and insulted. LILY enjoys this, then adds quietly*) Oh, not in those words. Martha is a perfect lady. But she made it plain she will thank you to mind your own business.

ESTHER. (*volubly*) And just imagine, she'd even forgotten she'd asked us here this afternoon and was going motoring with Bigelow.

LILY. With his three children, too, don't forget.

EMILY. (*softly*) They have become such well-behaved and intelligent children, they say. (*Again all the others hesitate, staring at her suspiciously*).

LILY. (*sharply*) You'd better let Martha train yours for a while, Emily. I'm sure she'd improve their manners—though, of course, she couldn't give them any intelligence.

EMILY. (*with the pathos of outraged innocence*) Oh!

DICK. (*interrupting*) So it's Bigelow you're up in the air about? (*He gives a low whistle—then frowns angrily*) The deuce you say!

LILY. (*mockingly*) Look at our soldier boy home from the wars getting serious about the family honor! It's too bad this

is a rough, untutored country where they don't permit dueling, isn't it, Dick?

DICK. (*his pose crumbling—angrily*) Go to the devil!

SHEFFIELD. (*with a calm, judicious air*) This wrangling is getting us nowhere. You say she was resentful about our well-meant word to the wise?

JAYSON. (*testily*) Surely she must realize that some consideration is due the position she occupies in Bridgetown as Curt's wife.

LILY. Martha is properly unimpressed by big frogs in tiny puddles. And there you are.

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*outraged*) The idea! She takes a lot upon herself—the daughter of a Wild Western coal-miner.

LILY. (*mockingly*) Gold miner, Aunt.

MRS. DAVIDSON. It makes no difference—a common miner!

SHEFFIELD. (*keenly inquisitive*) Just before the others came, Lily, you gave out some hints—very definite hints, I should say——

ESTHER. (*excitedly*) Yes, you did, Lily. What did you mean?

LILY. (*uncertainly*) Perhaps I shouldn't have. It's not my secret. (*Enjoying herself immensely now that she holds the spotlight—after a pause, in a stage whisper*) Shall I tell you? Yes, I can't help telling. Well, Martha is going to have a son. (*They are all stunned and flabbergasted and stare at her speechlessly*).

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*her face lighting up—joyously*) A son! Curt's son!

JAYSON. (*pleased by the idea but bewildered*) A son?

DICK. (*smartly*) Lily's kidding you. How can she know it's a son—unless she's a clairvoyant.

ESTHER. (*with glad relief*) Yes, how stupid!

LILY. I am clairvoyant in this case. Allah is great and it will be a son—if only to make you and Emily burst with envy among your daughters.

ESTHER. Lily!

EMILY. Oh!

JAYSON. (*testily*) Keep still for a moment, Lily, for God's sake. This is no subject to joke about, remember.

LILY. Martha told me. I know that.

JAYSON. And does Curt know this?

LILY. No, not yet. Martha has been afraid to tell him.

JAYSON. Ah, that explains matters. You know I asked Curt some time ago—and he said it was impossible.

EMILY. (*with a lift of her eyebrows*) Impossible? Why, what a funny thing to say.

SHEFFIELD. (*keenly lawyer-like*) And why is Martha afraid to tell him, Lily?

LILY. It's all very simple. When the two died years ago, they said they would never have one again. Martha thinks Curt is still haunted by their memory and is afraid he will resent another as an intruder. I told her that was all foolishness—that a child was the one thing to make Curt settle down for good at home here and write his books.

JAYSON. (*eagerly*) Yes, I believe that myself. (*Pleased*) Well, this is fine news.

EMILY. Still it was her duty to tell Curt, don't you think? I don't see how she could be afraid of Curt—for those reasons. (*They all stare at her*).

ESTHER. (*resentfully*) I don't, either. Why, Curt's the biggest-hearted and kindest——

EMILY. I wonder how long she's known—this?

LILY. (*sharply*) Two months, she said.

EMILY. Two months? (*She lets this sink in*).

JOHN. (*quickly scenting something—eagerly*) What do you mean, Emily? (*Then as if he read her mind*) Two months? But before that—Curt was away in New York almost a month!

LILY. (*turning on EMILY fiercely*) So! You got someone to say it for you as you always do, Poison Mind! Oh, I wish the ducking stool had never been abolished!

EMILY. (*growing crimson—falteringly*) I—I didn't mean——

JOHN. (*furiously*) Where the honor of the family is at stake——

LILY. (*fiercely*) Ssshh, you empty barrel! I think I hear—
(*The door from the study is opened and MARTHA comes in in the midst of a heavy silence. All the gentlemen rise stiffly. MARTHA is made immediately self-conscious and resentful by the feeling that they have been discussing her unfavorably*).

MARTHA. (*coming forward—with a forced cordiality*) How do you do, everybody? So sorry I wasn't here when you came. I hope Lily made proper excuses for me. (*She goes from one to the other of the four latest comers with "So glad you came," etc. They reply formally and perfunctorily. MARTHA finally finds a seat on the couch between EMILY and ESTHER*) I hope Lily—but I see you've all had tea.

LILY. (*trying to save the situation—gayly*) Yes. You can trust me as understudy for the part of hostess any time.

MARTHA. (*forcing a smile*) Well, I'm glad to know I wasn't missed.

EMILY. (*sweetly*) We were talking about you—at least, we were listening to Lily talk about you.

MARTHA. (*stiffening defensively*) About me?

EMILY. Yes—about how devoted you were to Curt's work.
(LILY gives her a venomous glance of scorn).

MARTHA. (*pleased but inwardly uneasy*) Oh, but you see I consider it my work, too, I've helped him with it so long now.

JAYSON. (*in a forced tone*) And how is Curt's book coming, Martha?

MARTHA. (*more and more stung by their strained attitudes and inquisitive glances. Coldly and cuttingly*) Finely, thank you. The book will cause quite a stir, I believe. It will make the name of Jayson famous in the big world outside of Bridge-town.

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*indignantly*) The name of Jayson has been——

JAYSON. (*pleadingly*) Aunt Elizabeth!

LILY. Aunt means it's world famous already, Martha. (*Pointing to the sullen JOHN*) John was once a substitute on the Yale Freshman soccer team, you know. If it wasn't for his weak shins he would have made the team, fancy!

DICK. (*this tickles his sense of humor and he bursts into laughter*) Lily wins! (*As his brother glares at him—looking at his watch*) Heavens, I'll have to hustle! (*Gets to his feet*) I'm due at the Casino. (*Comes and shakes MARTHA's hand formally*) I'm sorry I can't stay.

MARTHA. So glad you came. Do come in again any time. We keep open house, you know—Western fashion. (*She accentuates this*).

DICK. (*hurriedly*) Delighted to. (*He starts for the door in rear*).

LILY. (*as if suddenly making up her mind*) Wait a second! I'm coming with you——

DICK. Sure thing—only hurry, darn you! (*He goes out*).

LILY. (*stops at the door in rear and catching MARTHA's eye, looks meaningly at the others*) Phew! I need fresh air! (*She makes an encouraging motion as if pummeling someone to MARTHA, indicating her assembled family as the victim—then goes out laughing. A motor is heard starting—running off*).

ESTHER. (*with a huge sigh of relief*) Thank goodness, she's gone. What a vixen! What would you do if you had a sister like that, Martha?

MARTHA. I'd love her—and try to understand her.

SHEFFIELD. (*meaningly*) She's a bad ally to rely on—this side of the fence one day, and that the next.

MARTHA. Is that why you advised her to become a lawyer, Mr. Sheffield?

SHEFFIELD. (*stung, but maintaining an unruffled front*) Now, now, that remark must be catalogued as catty.

MARTHA. (*defiantly*) It seems to be in the Bridgetown atmosphere. I never was—not the least bit—in the open air.

JAYSON. (*conciliatingly*) Oh, Bridgetown isn't so bad, Martha, once you get used to us.

JOHN. It's one of the most prosperous and wealthy towns in the U. S.—and that means in the world, nowadays.

EMILY. (*with her sugary smile*) That isn't what Martha means, you silly. I know what she's thinking about us, and I'm not sure that I don't agree with her—partly. She feels that we're so awfully strict—about certain things. It must be so different in the Far West—I suppose—so much freer.

MARTHA. (*acidly*) Then you believe broadmindedness and clean thinking are a question of locality? I can't agree with you. I know nothing of the present Far West, not having lived there for ten years, but Curt and I have lived in the Far East and I'm sure he'd agree with me in saying that Chinese ancestor

worship is far more dignified than ours. After all, you know, theirs is religion, not snobbery. (*There is a loud honking of an auto horn before the house. MARTHA starts, seems to come to a quick decision, and announces with studied carelessness*) That must be Mr. Bigelow. I suppose Lily told you I had an engagement to go motoring with him. So sorry I must leave. But I'm like Lily. I need fresh air. (*She walks to the study door as she is talking*) I'll call Curt. (*She raps loudly on the door and calls*). Curt! Come out! It's important. (*She turns and goes to the door, smiling fixedly*) He'll be out when he's through swearing. (*She goes out, rear*).

JOHN. (*exploding*) Well, of all the damned cheek!

ESTHER. She shows her breeding, I must say.

EMILY. (*with horror*) Oh, how rude—and insulting.

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*rising rigidly to her feet*) I will never set foot in this house again!

JAYSON. (*jumping up to restrain her—worriedly*) Now, Aunt Elizabeth, do keep your head! We must have no scandal of any sort. Remember there are servants about. Do sit down. (*The old lady refuses in stubborn silence*).

SHEFFIELD. (*judiciously*) One must make allowances for one in her condition, Aunt.

JAYSON. (*snatching at this*) Exactly. Remember her condition, Aunt (*testily*) and do sit down. (*The old lady plumps herself down again angrily*).

EMILY. (*in her lisp of hidden meanings*) Yes, the family mustn't forget—her condition. (*The door from the study is opened and CURTIS appears. His face shows his annoyance at being interrupted, his eyes are preoccupied. They all turn and greet him embarrassedly. He nods silently and comes slowly down front*).

CURTIS. (*looking around*) Where's Martha? What's the important thing she called me out for?

ESTHER. (*forcing gayety*) To play host, you big bear, you! Don't you think we came to see you, too? Sit down here and be good. (*He sits on sofa*).

EMILY. (*softly*) Martha had to leave us to go motoring with Mr. Bigelow.

ESTHER. (*hastily*) And the three children.

CURTIS. (*frowning grumpily*) Hm! Big and his eternal kids. (*He sighs. They exchange meaning glances. CURTIS seems to feel ashamed of his grumpiness and tries to fling it off—with a cheerful smile*) But what the deuce! I must be getting selfish to grudge Martha her bit of fresh air. You don't know what it means to outdoor animals like us to be pent up. (*He springs to his feet and paces back and forth nervously*) We're used to living with the sky for a roof— (*Then interestedly*) Did Martha tell you I'd definitely decided to go on the five year Asian expedition?

ESTHER. Curt! You're not!

EMILY. And leave Martha here—all alone—for five years?

JAYSON. Yes, you can't take Martha with you this time, you know.

CURTIS. (*with a laugh*) No? What makes you so sure of that? (*As they look mystified, he continues confidentially*) I'll let you in on the secret—only you must all promise not to breathe a word to Martha—until tomorrow. Tomorrow is her birthday, you know, and this is a surprise I've saved for her. (*They all nod*) I've been intriguing my damndest for the past month to get permission for Martha to go with me. It was difficult because women are supposed to be barred. (*Happily*) But I've succeeded. The letter came this morning. How tickled

to death she'll be when she hears! I know she's given up hope. (*Thoughtfully*) I suppose it's that has been making her act so out-of-sorts lately.

JAYSON. (*worriedly*) Hmm! But would you persist in going—alone—if you knew it was impossible for her——?

CURTIS—(*frowning*) I can't imagine it without her. You people can't have any idea what a help—a chum—she's been. You can't believe that a woman could be—so much that—in a life of that kind, how I've grown to depend on her. The thousand details—she attends to them all. She remembers everything. Why, I'd be lost. I wouldn't know how to start. (*With a laugh*) I know this sounds like a confession of weakness but it's true just the same. (*Frowning again*) However, naturally my work must always be the first consideration. Yes, absolutely! (*Then with glad relief*) But what's the use of rambling on this way? We can both go, thank heaven!

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*sternly*) No. *She* cannot go. And it is *your* duty——

CURTIS. (*interrupting her with a trace of impatience*) Oh, come! That's all nonsense, Aunt. You don't understand the kind of woman Martha is.

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*harshly*) The women I understand prefer rearing their children to selfish gallivanting over the world.

CURTIS. (*impatiently*) But we have no children now, Aunt.

MRS. DAVIDSON. I know that, more's the pity. But later——

CURTIS. (*emphatically*) No, I tell you! It's impossible!

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*grimly*) I have said my last word. Go your own road and work your own ruin.

CURTIS. (*brusquely*) I think I'll change my togs and go for a walk. Excuse me for a second. I'll be right down again. (*He goes out, rear*).

EMILY. (*with her false air of innocence*) Curt acts so funny, doesn't he? Did you notice how emphatic he was about it's being impossible? And he said Martha seemed to him to be acting queer lately—with him, I suppose he meant.

ESTHER. He certainly appeared put out when he heard she'd gone motoring with Big.

JAYSON. (*moodily*) This dislike of the very mention of children. It isn't like Curt, not a bit.

JOHN. There's something rotten in Denmark somewhere. This family will yet live to regret having accepted a stranger——

SHEFFIELD. (*mollifyingly—with a judicial air*) Come now! This is all only suspicion. There is no evidence; you have no case; and the defendant is innocent until you have proved her guilty, remember. (*Getting to his feet*) Well, let's break up. Esther, you and I ought to be getting home. (*They all rise*).

JAYSON. (*testily*) Well, if I were sure it would all blow over without any open scandal, I'd offer up a prayer of thanks.

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT TWO

SCENE. CURTIS JAYSON's study.

On the left, forward, a gun rack in which are displayed several varieties of rifles and shotguns. Farther back, three windows looking out on the garden. In the rear wall, an open fireplace with two leather armchairs in front of it. To right of fireplace, a door leading into the living-room. In the far right corner, another chair. In the right wall, three windows looking out on the lawn and garden. On this side, front, a typewriting table with machine and chair. Opposite the windows on the right, a bulky leather couch, facing front. In front of the windows on the left, a long table with stacks of paper piled here and there on it, reference books, etc. On the left of table, a swivel chair. Gray oak bookcases are built into the cream rough plaster walls which are otherwise almost hidden from view by a collection of all sorts of hunter's trophies, animal heads of all kinds. The floor is covered with animal skins—tiger, polar bear, leopard, lion, etc. Skins are also thrown over the backs of the chairs. The sections of the bookcase not occupied by scientific volumes have been turned into a specimen case for all sorts of zoölogical, geographical, anthropological oddities.

It is mid-morning, sunny and bright, of the following day.

CURTIS and BIGELOW are discovered. CURTIS is half-sitting on the corner of the table, left, smoking a pipe. BIGELOW is lying sprawled on the couch. Through the open windows on the right come the shouts of children playing. MARTHA's voice joins in with theirs.

BIGELOW. Listen to that rumpus, will you! The kids are having the time of their lives. (*He goes to the window and looks out—delightedly*) Your wife is playing hide and seek with them. Come and look.

CURTIS. (*with a trace of annoyance*) Oh, I can see well enough from here.

BIGELOW. (*with a laugh*) She seems to get as much fun out of it as they do. (*As a shriek comes from outside—excitedly*) Ah, Eddy discovered her behind the tree. Isn't he tickled now! (*He turns back from the window and lights a cigarette—enthusiastically*) Jove, what a hand she is with children!

CURTIS. (*as if the subject bored him*) Oh, Martha gets along well with anyone.

BIGELOW. (*sits on the couch again—with a sceptical smile*) You think so? With everyone?

CURTIS. (*surprised*) Yes—with everyone we've ever come in contact with—even aboriginal natives.

BIGELOW. With the aboriginal natives of Bridgetown? With the well-known Jayson family, for example?

CURTIS. (*getting to his feet—frowning*) Why, everything's all right between Martha and them, isn't it? What do you mean, Big? I certainly imagined—but I'll confess this damn book has had me so preoccupied—

BIGELOW. Too darn preoccupied, if you'll pardon my saying so. It's not fair to leave her to fight it alone.

CURTIS. (*impatiently*) Fight what? Martha has a sense of humor. I'm sure their petty prejudices merely amuse her.

BIGELOW. (*sententiously*) A mosquito is a ridiculous, amusing creature, seen under a microscope; but when a swarm has been stinging you all night—

CURTIS. (*a broad grin coming over his face*) You speak from experience, eh?

BIGELOW. (*smiling*) You bet I do. Touch me anywhere and you'll find a bite. This, my native town, did me the honor of devoting its entire leisure attention for years to stinging me to death.

CURTIS. Well, if I am to believe one-tenth of the family letters I used to receive on the subject of my old friend, Bigelow, they sure had just cause.

BIGELOW. Oh, I'll play fair. I'll admit they did—then. But it's exasperating to know they never give you credit for changing—I almost said, reforming. One ought to be above the gossip of a town like this—but say what you like, it does get under your skin.

CURTIS. (*with an indulgent smile*) So you'd like to be known as a reformed character, eh?

BIGELOW. (*rather ruefully*) Et tu! Your tone is sceptical. But I swear to you, Curt, I'm an absolutely new man since my wife's death, since I've grown to love the children. Before that I hardly knew them. They were hers, not mine, it seemed. (*His face lighting up*) Now we're the best of pals, and I've commenced to appreciate life from a different angle. I've found a career at last—the children—the finest career a man could have, I believe.

CURTIS. (*indifferently*) Yes, I suppose so—if you're made that way.

BIGELOW. Meaning you're not?

CURTIS. Not any more. (*Frowning*) I tried that once.

BIGELOW. (*after a pause—with a smile*) But we're wandering from the subject of Martha versus the mosquitoes.

CURTIS. (*with a short laugh*) Oh, to the deuce with that!

Trust Martha to take care of herself. Besides, I'll have her out of this stagnant hole before so very long—six months, to be exact.

BIGELOW. Where do you think of settling her then?

CURTIS. No settling about it. I'm going to take her with me.

BIGELOW. (*surprised*) On the Asian expedition?

CURTIS. Yes. I haven't told her yet but I'm going to today. It's her birthday—and I've been saving the news to surprise her with.

BIGELOW. Her birthday? I wish the children and I had known—but it's not too late yet.

CURTIS. (*with a grin*) Thirty-nine candles, if you're thinking of baking a cake!

BIGELOW. (*meaningly*) That's not old—but it's not young either, Curt.

CURTIS. (*disgustedly*) You talk like an old woman, Big. What have years to do with it? Martha is young in spirit and always will be. (*There is a knock at the door and MARTHA'S voice calling: "May I come in, people?"*) Sure thing! (*BIGELOW jumps to open the door and MARTHA enters. She is flushed, excited, full of the joy of life, panting from her exertions.*)

MARTHA. (*laughing*) I've had to run away and leave them with the governess. They're too active for me. (*She throws herself on the couch*) Phew! I'm all tired out. I must be getting old.

CURTIS. (*with a grin*) Big was just this minute remarking that, Martha. (*BIGELOW looks embarrassed*).

MARTHA. (*laughing at him*) Well, I declare! Of all the horrid things to hear——

BIGELOW. (*still embarrassed but forcing a joking tone*) He—prevaricates, Mrs. Jayson.

MARTHA. There nòw, Curt! I'm sure it was you who said it. It sounds just like one of your horrid facts.

BIGELOW. And how can I offer my felicitations now? But I do, despite your husband's calumny. May your shadow never grow less!

MARTHA. Thank you. (*She shakes his proffered hand heartily*).

BIGELOW. And now I'll collect my flock and go home.

CURTIS. So long, Big. Be sure you don't mislay one of your heirs!

BIGELOW. No fear—but they might mislay me. (*He goes. CURTIS sits down on couch. MARTHA goes to the window right, and looks out—after a pause, waving her hand*).

MARTHA. There they go. What darlings they are! (*CURTIS grunts perfunctorily. MARTHA comes back and sits beside CURTIS on the couch—with a sigh*) Whoever did say it was right, Curt. I am getting old.

CURTIS. (*taking one of her hands and patting it*) Nonsense!

MARTHA. (*shaking her head and smiling with a touch of sadness*) No. I feel it.

CURTIS. (*puts his arms around her protectingly*) Nonsense! You're not the sort that ever grows old.

MARTHA. (*nestling up to him*) I'm afraid we're all that sort, dear. Even you. (*She touches the white hair about his temples playfully*) Circumstantial evidence. I'll have to dye it when you're asleep some time—and then nobody'll know.

CURTIS. (*looking at her*) You haven't any silver threads. (*Jokingly*) Am I to suspect—?

MARTHA. No, I don't. Honest, cross my heart, I wouldn't even conceal that from you, if I did. But gray hairs prove nothing. I am actually older than you, don't forget.

CURTIS. One whole year! That's frightful, isn't it?

MARTHA. I'm a woman, remember; so that one means at least six. Ugh! Let's not talk about it. Do you know, it really fills me with a queer panic sometimes?

CURTIS. (*squeezing her*) Silly girl!

MARTHA. (*snuggling close to him*) Will you always love me—even when I'm old and ugly and feeble and you're still young and strong and handsome?

CURTIS. (*kisses her—tenderly*) Martha! What a foolish question, sweetheart. If we ever have to grow old, we'll do it together just as we've always done everything.

MARTHA. (*with a happy sigh*) That's my dream of happiness, Curt. (*Enthusiastically*) Oh, it has been a wonderful, strange life we've lived together, Curt, hasn't it? You're sure you've never regretted, never had the weest doubt that it might have been better with—someone else?

CURTIS. (*kisses her again—tenderly reproachful*) Martha!

MARTHA. And I have helped—really helped you, haven't I?

CURTIS. (*much moved*) You've been the best wife a man could ever wish for, Martha. You've been—you are wonderful. I owe everything to you—your sympathy and encouragement. Don't you know I realize that? (*She kisses him gratefully*).

MARTHA. (*musng happily*) Yes, it's been a wonderful, glorious life. I'd live it over again if I could, every single second of it—even the terrible suffering—the children.

CURTIS. (*wincing*) Don't. I wouldn't want that over again. (*Then changing the subject abruptly*) But why have you been putting all our life into the past tense? It seems to me the most interesting part is still ahead of us.

MARTHA. (*softly*) I mean—together—Curt.

CURTIS. So do I!

MARTHA. But you're going away—and I can't go with you this time.

CURTIS. (*smiling to himself over her head*) Yes, that does complicate matters, doesn't it?

MARTHA. (*hurt—looking up at him*) Curt! How indifferently you say that—as if you didn't care!

CURTIS. (*Avoiding her eyes—teasingly*) What do you think you'll do all the time I'm gone?

MARTHA. Oh, I'll be lost—dead—I won't know what to do. I'll die of loneliness— (*yearning creeping into her voice*) unless——

CURTIS. (*inquisitively*) Unless what?

MARTHA. (*burying her face on his shoulders—passionately*) Oh, Curt, I love you so! Swear that you'll always love me no matter what I do—no matter what I ask——

CURTIS. (*vaguely uneasy now, trying to peer into her face*) But, sweetheart——

MARTHA. (*giving way weakly to her feelings for a moment—entreatingly*) Then don't go!

CURTIS. (*astonished*) Why, I've got to go. You know that.

MARTHA. Yes, I suppose you have. (*Vigorously, as if flinging off a weakness*) Of course you have!

CURTIS. But, Martha, you said you'd be lonely unless—unless what?

MARTHA. Unless I— (*She hesitates, blushing and confused*) I mean we—oh, I'm so afraid of what you'll—hold me close, very close to you and I'll whisper it. (*She pulls his head down and whispers in his ear. A look of disappointment and aversion forces itself on his face*).

CURTIS. (*almost indignantly*) But that's impossible, Martha!

MARTHA. (*pleadingly*) Now don't be angry with me, Curt—not till you've heard everything. (*With a trace of defiance*) It isn't impossible, Curt. It's so! It's happened! I was saving it as a secret—to tell you today—on my birthday.

CURTIS. (*stunned*) You mean it's a fact?

MARTHA. Yes. (*Then pitifully*) Oh, Curt, don't look that way! You seem so cold—so far away from me. (*Straining her arms about him*) Why don't you hold me close to you? Why don't you say you're glad—for my sake?

CURTIS. (*agitatedly*) But Martha, you don't understand. How can I pretend gladness when— (*Vehemently*) Why, it would spoil all our plans!

MARTHA. Plans? Our plans? What do you mean?

CURTIS. (*excitedly*) Why, you're going with me, of course! I've obtained official permission. I've been working for it for months. The letter came yesterday morning.

MARTHA. (*stunned*) Permission—to go with you——?

CURTIS. (*excitedly*) Yes. I couldn't conceive going without you. And I knew how you must be wishing——

MARTHA. (*in pain*) Oh!

CURTIS. (*distractedly—jumping to his feet and staring at her bewilderedly*) Martha! You don't mean to tell me you weren't!

MARTHA. (*in a crushed voice*) I was wishing you'd finally decide not to go——

CURTIS. (*betraying exasperation*) But you must realize that's impossible. Martha, are you sure you've clearly understood what I've told you? You can go with me, do you hear? Everything is arranged. And I've had to fight so hard—I was

running the risk of losing my own chance by my insistence that I couldn't go without you.

MARTHA. (*weakly and helplessly*) I understand all that, Curt.

CURTIS. (*indignantly*) And yet you hesitate! Why, this is the greatest thing of its kind ever attempted! There are unprecedented possibilities! A whole new world of knowledge may be opened up, the very origin of Man himself! And you will be the only woman——

MARTHA. I realize all that, Curt.

CURTIS. You can't—and hesitate! And then—think, Martha!—it will mean that you and I won't have to be separated. We can go on living the old, free life together.

MARTHA. (*growing calm now*) You are forgetting—what I told you, Curt. You must face the fact. I can't go.

CURTIS. (*overwhelmed by the finality of her tone—after a pause*) How long have you known this?

MARTHA—Two months, about.

CURTIS. But why didn't you tell me before?

MARTHA. I was afraid you wouldn't understand—and you haven't, Curt. But why didn't you tell me before what you were planning?

CURTIS. (*eagerly*) You mean—then you would have been glad to go—before this had happened?

MARTHA. I would have accepted it.

CURTIS. (*despairingly*) Martha, how could you ever have allowed this to happen? Oh, I suppose I'm talking foolishness. It wasn't your seeking, I know.

MARTHA. Yes, it was, Curt.

CURTIS. (*indignantly*) Martha! (*Then in a hurt tone*) You have broken the promise we made when they died. We

were to keep their memories inviolate. They were to be always—our only children.

MARTHA. (*gently*) They forgive me, Curt. And you'll forgive me, too, when you see him—and love him.

CURTIS. Him?

MARTHA. I know it will be a boy.

CURTIS. (*sinking down on the couch beside her—dully*) Martha! You have blown my world to bits.

MARTHA. (*taking one of his hands in hers—gently*) You must make allowances for me, Curt, and forgive me. I *am* getting old. No, it's the truth. I've reached the turning point. Will you listen to my side of it, Curt, and try to see it—with sympathy—with true understanding— (*With a trace of bitterness*)—forgetting your work for the moment?

CURTIS. (*miserably*) That's unfair, Martha. I think of it as *our* work—and I have always believed you did, too.

MARTHA. (*quickly*) I did, Curt! I do! All in the past is *our* work. It's my greatest pride to think so. But, Curt, I'll have to confess frankly—during the past two years I've felt myself feeling as if I wasn't complete—with that alone.

CURTIS. Martha! (*Bitterly*) And all the time I believed that more and more it was becoming the aim of your life, too.

MARTHA. (*with a sad smile*) I'm glad of that, dear. I tried my best to conceal it from you. It would have been so unfair to let you guess while we were still in harness. But oh, how I kept looking forward to the time when we would come back—and rest—in our own home! You know, you said that was your plan—to stay here and write your books—and I was hoping—

CURTIS. (*with a gesture of aversion*) I loathe this book-writing. It isn't my part, I realize now. But when I made the plans you speak of, how could I know that then?

MARTHA. (*decisively*) You've got to go. I won't try to stop you. I'll help all in my power—as I've always done. Only—I can't go with you any more. And you must help me—to do my work—by understanding it. (*He is silent, frowning, his face agitated, preoccupied. She goes on intensely*) Oh, Curt, I wish I could tell you what I feel, make you feel with me the longing for a child. If you had just the tiniest bit of feminine in you—! (*Forcing a smile*) But you're so utterly masculine, dear! That's what has made me love you, I suppose—so I've no right to complain of it. (*Intensely*) I don't. I wouldn't have you changed one bit! I love you! And I love the things you love—your work—because it's a part of you. And that's what I want you to do—to reciprocate—to love the creator in me—to desire that I, too, should complete myself with the thing nearest my heart!

CURTIS. (*intensely preoccupied with his own struggle—vaguely*) But I thought——

MARTHA. I know; but, after all, your work is yours, not mine. I have been only a helper, a good comrade, too, I hope, but—somehow—outside of it all. Do you remember two years ago when we were camped in Yunnan, among the aboriginal tribes? It was one night there when we were lying out in our sleeping-bags up in the mountains along the Tibetan frontier. I couldn't sleep. Suddenly I felt oh, so tired—utterly alone—out of harmony with you—with the earth under me. I became horribly despondent—like an outcast who suddenly realizes the whole world is alien. And all the wandering about the world, and all the romance and excitement I'd enjoyed in it, appeared an aimless, futile business, chasing around in a circle in an effort to avoid touching reality. Forgive me, Curt. I meant myself, not you, of course. Oh, it was horrible, I tell you, to feel

that way. I tried to laugh at myself, to fight it off, but it stayed and grew worse. It seemed as if I were the only creature alive—who was not alive. And all at once the picture came of a tribeswoman who stood looking at us in a little mountain village as we rode by. She was nursing her child. Her eyes were so curiously sure of herself. She was horribly ugly, poor woman, and yet—as the picture came back to me—I appeared to myself the ugly one while she was beautiful. And I thought of our children who had died—and such a longing for another child came to me that I began sobbing. You were asleep. You didn't hear. (*She pauses—then proceeds slowly*) And when we came back here—to have a home at last, I was so happy because I saw my chance of fulfillment—before it was too late. (*In a gentle, pleading voice*) Now can you understand, dear? (*She puts her hand on his arm*).

CURTIS. (*starting as if awaking from a sleep*) Understand? No, I can't understand, Martha.

MARTHA. (*in a gasp of unbearable hurt*) Curt! I don't believe you heard a word I was saying.

CURTIS. (*bursting forth as if releasing all the pent-up struggle that has been gathering within him*) No, I can't understand. I can't! It seems like treachery to me.

MARTHA. Curt!

CURTIS. I've depended on you. This is the crucial point—the biggest thing of my life—and you desert me!

MARTHA. (*resentment gathering in her eyes*) If you'd listened to me—if you'd even tried to feel——

CURTIS. I feel that you're deliberately ruining my highest hope. How can I go on without you? I've been trying to imagine myself alone. I can't! Even with my work—who can I get to take your place? Oh, Martha, why do you have to bring this

new element into our lives at this late day? Haven't we been sufficient, you and I together? Isn't that a more difficult, beautiful happiness to achieve than—children? Everyone has children. Don't I love you as much as any man could love a woman? Isn't that enough for you? Doesn't it mean anything to you that I need you so terribly—for myself, for my work—for everything that is best and worthiest in me? Can you expect me to be glad when you propose to introduce a stranger who will steal away your love, your interest—who will separate us and deprive me of you! No, no, I can't! It's asking the impossible. I'm only human.

MARTHA. If you were human you'd think of my life as well as yours.

CURTIS. I do! It's *our* life I am fighting for, not mine—*our* life that you want to destroy.

MARTHA. Our life seems to mean your life to you, Curt—and only your life. I have devoted fifteen years to that. Now I must fight for my own.

CURTIS. (*aghast*) You talk as if we were enemies, Martha! (*Striding forward and seizing her in his arms*) No, you don't mean it! I love you so, Martha! You've made yourself part of my life, my work—I need you so! I can't share you with anyone! I won't! Martha, my own! Say that you won't, dear? (*He kisses her passionately again and again*).

MARTHA. (*all her love and tenderness aroused by his kisses and passionate sincerity—weakening*) Curt! Curt! (*Pitiably*) It won't separate us, dear. Can't you see he will be a link between us—even when we're away from each other—that he will bring us together all the closer?

CURTIS. But I can't be away from you!

MARTHA. (*miserably*) Oh, Curt, why won't you look the

fact in the face—and learn to accept it with joy? Why can't you for my sake? I would do that for you.

CURTIS. (*breaking away from her—passionately*) You will not do what I have implored you—for me! And I am looking the fact in the face—the fact that there must be no fact! (*Avoiding her eyes—as if defying his own finer feelings*) There are doctors who——

MARTHA. (*shrinking back from him*) Curt! You propose that—to me! (*With overwhelming sorrow*) Oh, Curt! When I feel him—his life within me—like a budding of my deepest soul—you say what you have just said! (*Grief-stricken*) Oh, you never, never, never will understand!

CURTIS. (*shamefacedly*) Martha, I— (*Distractedly*) I don't know what I'm saying! This whole situation is so unbearable! Why does it have to happen now?

MARTHA. (*gently*) It must be now—or not at all—at my age, dear. (*Then after a pause—staring at him frightenedly—sadly*) You've changed, Curt. I remember it used to be your happiness to sacrifice yourself for me.

CURTIS. I had no work then—no purpose beyond myself. To sacrifice oneself is easy. But when your only meaning becomes as a searcher for knowledge—you can't sacrifice that, Martha. You must sacrifice everything for that or lose all sincerity.

MARTHA. I wonder where your work leaves off and you begin. Hasn't your work become you?

CURTIS. Yes and no. (*helplessly*) You can't understand, Martha! . . .

MARTHA. Nor you.

CURTIS. (*with a trace of bitter irony*) And you and your work? Aren't they one and the same?

MARTHA. So you think mine is selfish, too? (*After a pause—*

sadly) I can't blame you, Curt. It's all my fault. I've spoiled you by giving up my life so completely to yours. You've forgotten I have one. Oh, I don't mean that I was a martyr. I know that in you alone lay my happiness in those years—after the children died. But we are no longer what we were then. We must, both of us, relearn to love and respect—what we have become.

CURTIS. (*violently*) Nonsense! You talk as if love were an intellectual process— (*Taking her into his arms—passionately*) I love you—— You are me and I am you! What use is all this vivisection? (*He kisses her fiercely. They look into each other's eyes for a second—then instinctively fall back from one another*).

MARTHA. (*in a whisper*) Yes, you love me. But who am I? You don't know.

CURTIS. (*frightfully*) Martha! Stop! This is terrible! (*They continue to be held by each other's fearfully questioning eyes*).

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT THREE

SCENE. *Same as Act Two.*

As the curtain rises, JAYSON is discovered sitting in an arm-chair by the fireplace, in which a log fire is burning fitfully. He is staring into the flames, a strained, expectant expression on his face. It is about three o'clock in the morning. There is no light but that furnished by the fire which fills the room with shifting shadows. The door in the rear is opened and RICHARD appears, his face harried by the stress of unusual emotion. Through the open doorway, a low, muffled moan of anguish sounds from the upper part of the house. JAYSON and RICHARD both shudder. The latter closes the door behind him quickly as if anxious to shut out the noise.

JAYSON. (*looking up anxiously*) Well?

RICHARD. (*involuntarily straightening up as if about to salute and report to a superior officer*) No change, sir. (*Then, as if remembering himself, comes to the fireplace and slumps down in a chair—agitatedly*) God, Dad, I can't stand her moaning and screaming! It's got my nerves shot to pieces. I thought I was hardened. I've heard them out in No Man's Land—dying by inches—when you couldn't get to them or help—but this is worse—a million times! After all, that was war—and they were men——

JAYSON. Martha is having an exceptionally hard ordeal.

RICHARD. Since three o'clock this morning—yesterday morning, I should say. It's a wonder she isn't dead.

JAYSON. (*after a pause*) Where is Curt?

RICHARD. (*harshly*) Still out in the garden, walking around like a lunatic.

JAYSON. Why didn't you make him come in?

RICHARD. Make him! It's easy to say. He's in a queer state, Dad, I can tell you! There's something torturing him besides her pain——

JAYSON. (*after a pause*) Yes, there's a lot in all this we don't know about.

RICHARD. I suppose the reason he's so down on the family is because we've rather cut her since that tea affair.

JAYSON. He shouldn't blame us. She acted abominably and has certainly caused enough talk since then—always about with Bigelow——

RICHARD. (*with a sardonic laugh*) And yet he keeps asking everyone to send for Bigelow—says he wants to talk to him—not us. *We can't understand!* (*He laughs bitterly*).

JAYSON. I'm afraid Curt knows we understand too much. (*Agitatedly*) But why does he want Bigelow, in God's name? In his present state—with the suspicions he must have—there's liable to be a frightful scene.

RICHARD. Don't be afraid of a scene. (*With pitying scorn*) The hell of it is he seems to regard Bigelow as his best friend. Damned if I can make it out.

JAYSON. I gave orders that they were always to tell Curt Bigelow was out of town and couldn't be reached. (*With a sigh*) What a frightful situation for all of us! (*After a pause*) It may sound cruel of me—but—I can't help wishing for all our sakes that this child will never——

RICHARD. Yes, Dad, I know what you're thinking. It would be the best thing for it, too—although I hate myself for saying it. (*There is a pause. Then the door in rear is opened and*

LILY appears. *She is pale and agitated. Leaving the door open behind her she comes forward and flings herself on the lounge).*

JAYSON. (*anxiously*) Well?

LILY. (*irritably, getting up and switching on the lights*) Isn't everything gloomy enough? (*Sits down*) I couldn't bear it upstairs one second longer. Esther and Emily are coming down, too. It's too much for them—and they've had personal experience. (*Trying to mask her agitation by a pretense at flippancy*) I hereby become a life-member of the birth-control league. Let's let humanity cease—if God can't manage its continuance any better than that!

RICHARD. (*seriously*) Second the motion.

JAYSON. (*peevishly*) You're young idiots. Keep your blasphemous nonsense to yourself, Lily!

LILY. (*jumping up and stamping her foot—hysterically*) I can't stand it. Take me home, Dick, won't you? We're doing no good waiting here. I'll have a fit—or something—if I stay.

RICHARD. (*glad of the excuse to go himself—briskly*) That's how I feel. I'll drive you home. Come along. (*ESTHER and EMILY enter, followed by JOHN*).

LILY. (*excitedly*) I'll never marry or have a child! Never, never! I'll go into Mark's office tomorrow and make myself independent of marriage.

ESTHER. Sssh! Lily! Don't you know you're shouting? And what silly talk!

LILY. I'll show you whether it's silly! I'll——

RICHARD. (*impatiently*) Are you coming or not?

LILY. (*quickly*) Yes—wait—here I am. (*She pushes past the others and follows RICHARD out rear. ESTHER and EMILY sit on couch—JOHN on chair, right rear*).

ESTHER. (*with a sigh*) I thought I went through something when mine were born—but this is too awful.

EMILY. And, according to John, Curt actually says he hates it! Isn't that terrible? (*After a pause—meaningly*) It's almost as if her suffering was a punishment, don't you think?

ESTHER. If it is, she's being punished enough, Heaven knows. It can't go on this way much longer or something dreadful will happen.

EMILY. Do you think the baby——

ESTHER. I don't know. I shouldn't say it but perhaps it would be better if——

EMILY. That's what I think.

ESTHER. Oh, I wish I didn't have such evil suspicions—but the way Curt goes on—how can you help feeling there's something wrong?

JAYSON. (*suddenly*) How is Curt?

EMILY. John just came in from the garden. (*Turning around to where JOHN is dozing in his chair—sharply*) John! Well I never! If he isn't falling asleep! John! (*He jerks up his head and stares at her, blinking stupidly. She continues irritably*) A nice time to pick out for a nap, I must say.

JOHN. (*surlily*) Don't forget I have to be at the bank in the morning.

JAYSON. (*testily*) I have to be at the bank, too—and you don't notice me sleeping. Tell me about Curt. You just left him, didn't you?

JOHN. (*irritably*) Yes, and I've been walking around that damned garden half the night watching over him. Isn't that enough to wear anyone out? I can feel I've got a terrible cold coming on——

ESTHER. (*impatiently*) For goodness' sake, don't you start to pity yourself!

JOHN. (*indignantly*) I'm not. I think I've showed my willingness to do everything I could. If Curt was only the least bit grateful! He isn't. He hates us all and wishes we were out of his home. I would have left long ago if I didn't want to do my part in saving the family from disgrace.

JAYSON. (*impatiently*) Has he quieted down, that's what I want to know?

JOHN. (*harshly*) Not the least bit. He's out of his head—and I'd be out of mine if a child was being born to my wife that——

JAYSON. (*angrily*) Keep that to yourself! Remember you have no proof. (*Morosely*) Think all you want—but don't talk.

EMILY. (*pettishly*) The whole town knows it, anyway; I'm sure they must.

JAYSON. There's only been gossip—no real scandal. Let's do our united best to keep it at that. (*After a pause*) Where's Aunt Elizabeth? We'll have to keep an eye on her, too, or she's quite liable to blurt out the whole business before all comers.

ESTHER. You needn't be afraid. She's forgotten all about the scandalous part. No word of it has come to her out in the country and she hasn't set foot in town since that unfortunate tea, remember. And at present she's so busy wishing the child will be a boy, that she hasn't a thought for another thing (*The door in the rear is opened and MARK SHEFFIELD enters. He comes up to the fire to warm himself. The others watch him in silence for a moment*).

JAYSON. (*impatiently*) Well, Mark? Where's Curt?

SHEFFIELD. (*frowning*) Inside. I think he'll be with us in a minute. (*With a scornful smile*) Just now he's phoning to Bigelow. (*The others gasp*).

JAYSON. (*furiously*) For God's sake, couldn't you stop him?

SHEFFIELD. Not without a scene. Your Aunt persuaded him to come into the house—and he rushed for the phone. I think he guessed we had been lying to him——

JAYSON. (*after a pause*) Then he—Bigelow—will be here soon?

SHEFFIELD. (*dryly*) It depends on his sense of decency. As he seems lacking in that quality, I've no doubt he'll come.

JOHN. (*rising to his feet—pompously*) Then I, for one, will go. Come, Emily. Since Curt seems bound to disgrace everyone concerned, I want it thoroughly understood that we wash our hands of the whole disgraceful affair.

EMILY. (*snappishly*) Go if you want to! I won't! (*Then with a sacrificing air*) I think it is our duty to stay.

JAYSON. (*exasperated*) Sit down. Wash your hands indeed! Aren't you as much concerned as any of us?

SHEFFIELD. (*sharply*) Sshh! I think I hear Curt now. (*JOHN sits down abruptly. All stiffen into stony attitudes. The door is opened and CURTIS enters. He is incredibly drawn and haggard, a tortured, bewildered expression in his eyes. His hair is dishevelled, his boots caked with mud. He stands at the door staring from one to the other of his family with a wild, contemptuous scorn and mutters*).

CURTIS. Liars! Well, he's coming now. (*Then bewilderedly*) Why didn't you want him to come, eh? He's my oldest friend. I've got to talk to someone—and I can't to you. (*Wildly*) What do you want here, anyway? Why don't you go? (*A scream of MARTHA's is heard through the doorway. CURT shud-*

ders violently, slams the door to with a crash, putting his shoulders against it as if to bar out the sound inexorably—in anguish) God, why must she go through such agony? Why? Why? (He goes to the fireplace as MARK makes way for him, flings himself exhaustedly on a chair, his shoulders bowed, his face hidden in his hands. The others stare at him pityingly. There is a long silence. Then the two women whisper together, get up and tiptoe out of the room, motioning for the others to follow them. JOHN does so. SHEFFIELD starts to go, then notices the preoccupied JAYSON who is staring moodily into the fire).

SHEFFIELD. Sstt! (As JAYSON looks up—in a whisper) Let's go out and leave him alone. Perhaps he'll sleep.

JAYSON. (starting to follow SHEFFIELD, hesitates and puts a hand on his son's shoulder) Curt. Remember I'm your father. Can't you confide in me? I'll do anything to help.

CURTIS. (harshly) No, Dad. Leave me alone.

JAYSON. (piqued) As you wish. (He starts to go).

CURTIS. And send Big in to me as soon as he comes.

JAYSON. (stops, appears about to object—then remarks coldly) Very well—if you insist. (He switches off the lights. He hesitates at the door uncertainly, then opens it and goes out. There is a pause. Then CURTIS lifts his head and peers about the room. Seeing he is alone he springs to his feet and begins to pace back and forth, his teeth clenched, his features working convulsively. Then, as if attracted by an irresistible impulse, he goes to the closed door and puts his ear to the crack. He evidently hears his wife's moans for he starts away—in agony).

CURTIS. Oh, Martha, Martha! Martha, darling! (He flings himself in the chair by the fireplace—hides his face in his hands and sobs bitterly. There is a ring from somewhere in the house.

Soon after there is a knock at the door. CURTIS doesn't hear at first but when it is repeated he mutters huskily) Come in. (BIGELOW enters. CURTIS looks up at him) Close that door, Big, for God's sake!

BIGELOW. (*does so—then taking off his overcoat, hat, and throwing them on the lounge comes quickly over to CURTIS*) I got over as soon as I could. (*As he sees CURTIS' face he starts and says sympathetically*) By Jove, old man, you look as though you'd been through hell!

CURTIS. (*grimly*) I have. I am.

BIGELOW. (*slapping his back*) Buck up! (*Then anxiously*) How's Martha?

CURTIS. She's in hell, too——

BIGELOW. (*attempting consolation*) You're surely not worrying, are you? Martha is so strong and healthy there's no doubt of her pulling through in fine shape.

CURTIS. She should never have attempted this. (*After a pause*) I've a grudge against you, Big. It was you bringing your children over here that first planted this in her mind.

BIGELOW. (*after a pause*) I've guessed you thought that. That's why you haven't noticed me—or them—over here so much lately. I'll confess that I felt you— (*Angrily*) And the infernal gossip—I'll admit I thought that you—oh, damn this rotten town, anyway!

CURTIS. (*impatiently*) Oh, for God's sake! (*Bitterly*) I didn't want you here to discuss Bridgetown gossip.

BIGELOW. I know, old man, forgive me. (*In spite of the closed door one of MARTHA's agonized moans is heard. They both shudder*).

CURTIS. (*in a dead, monotonous tone*) She has been moan-

ing like that hour after hour. I'll have those sounds in my ears until the day I die.

BIGELOW. (*trying to distract him*) Deuce take it, Curt, I never thought you'd turn morbid.

CURTIS. (*darkly*) I've changed, Big—I hardly know myself any more.

BIGELOW. Once you're back on the job again, you'll be all right. You're still determined to go on this expedition, aren't you?

CURTIS. Yes. I was supposed to join them this week in New York but I've arranged to catch up with them in China—as soon as it's possible for us to go.

BIGELOW. Us?

CURTIS. (*angrily aggressive*) Yes, certainly! Why not? Martha ought to be able to travel in a month or so.

BIGELOW. Yes, but—do you think it would be safe to take the child?

CURTIS. (*with a bitter laugh*) Yes—I was forgetting the child, wasn't I? (*Viciously*) But perhaps— (*Then catching himself with a groan*) Oh, damn all children, Big!

BIGELOW. (*astonished*) Curt!

CURTIS. (*in anguish*) I can't help it—I've fought against it. But it's there—deep down in me—and I can't drive it out. I can't!

BIGELOW. (*bewildered*) What, Curt?

CURTIS. Hatred! Yes, hatred! What's the use of denying it? I must tell someone and you're the only one who might understand. (*With a wild laugh*) For you—hated your wife, didn't you?

BIGELOW. (*stunned*) Good God, you don't mean you hate—Martha?

CURTIS. (*raging*)· Hate Martha? How dare you, you fool! I love Martha—love her with every miserable drop of blood in me—with all my life—all my soul! She is my whole world—everything! Hate Martha! God, man, have you gone crazy to say such a mad thing? (*Savagely*) No. I hate it. It!

BIGELOW. (*shocked*) Curt! Don't you know you can't talk like that—now—when——

CURTIS. (*harshly*) It has made us both suffer torments—not only now—every day, every hour, for months and months. Why shouldn't I hate it, eh?

BIGELOW. (*staring at his friend's wild, distorted face with growing horror*) Curt! Can't you realize how horrible——

CURTIS. Yes, it's horrible. I've told myself that a million times. (*With emphasis*) But it's true!

BIGELOW. (*severely*) Shut up! What would Martha feel if she heard you going on this way? Why—it would kill her!

CURTIS. (*with a sobbing groan*) Oh, I know, I know! (*After a pause*) She read it in my eyes. Yes, it's horrible, but when I saw her there suffering so frightfully—I couldn't keep it out of my eyes. I tried to force it back—for her sake—but I couldn't. I was holding her hands and her eyes searched mine with such a longing question in them—and she read only my hatred there, not my love for her. And she screamed and seemed to try to push me away. I wanted to kneel down and pray for forgiveness—to tell her it was only my love for her—that I couldn't help it. And then the doctors told me to leave—and now the door is locked against me—— (*He sobs*).

BIGELOW. (*greatly moved*) This is only your damned imagination. They put you out because you were in their way, that's all. And as for Martha, she was probably suffering so much——

CURTIS. No. She read it in my eyes. I saw that look in hers—of horror—horror of me!

BIGELOW. (*gruffly*) You're raving, damn it!

CURTIS. (*unheeding*) It came home to her then—the undeniable truth. (*With a groan*) Isn't it fiendish that I should be the one to add to her torture—in spite of myself—in spite of all my will to conceal it! She'll never forgive me, never! And how can I forgive myself?

BIGELOW. (*distractedly*) For God's sake, don't think about it! It's ridiculous!

CURTIS. (*growing more calm—in a tone of obsession*) She's guessed it ever since that day when we quarreled—her birthday. Oh, you can have no idea of the misery there has been in our lives since then. You haven't seen or guessed the reason. No one has. It's been—the thought of it.

BIGELOW. Curt!

CURTIS. (*unheeding*) For years we two were sufficient, each to each. There was no room for a third. And it was a fine, free life we had made.

BIGELOW. But that life was your life, Curt——

CURTIS. (*vehemently*) No, it was her life, too—her work as well as mine. She had made the life, our life—the work, our work. Had she the right to repudiate what she'd built because she suddenly has a fancy for a home, children, a miserable ease?

BIGELOW. Curt!

CURTIS. Oh, I tried to become reconciled. I tried my damnedest. But I couldn't. I grew to dread the idea of this intruder. She saw this. I denied it—but she knew. There was something in each of us the other grew to hate. And still we loved as

never before, perhaps; for we grew to pity each other's helplessness.

BIGELOW. Curt! Are you sure you ought to tell anyone this?

CURTIS. (*waving his remark aside*) One day a thought suddenly struck me—a horrible but fascinating possibility that had never occurred to me before. (*With feverish intensity*) Can you guess what it was?

BIGELOW. No. And I think you've done enough morbid raving, if you ask me.

CURTIS. The thought came to me that if a certain thing happened, Martha could still go with me. And I knew, if it did happen, that she'd want to go, that she'd fling herself into the spirit of our work to forget, that she'd be mine more than ever.

BIGELOW. (*afraid to believe the obvious answer*) Curt!

CURTIS. Yes. My thought was that the child might be born dead.

BIGELOW. (*repelled—sternly*) Damn it, man, do you know what you're saying? (*Reluctantly*) No, Curt, old boy, do stop talking. If you don't I'll send for a doctor, damned if I won't. That talk belongs in an asylum. God, man, can't you realize this is your child—yours as well as hers?

CURTIS. I've tried. I can't. There is some force in me——

BIGELOW. (*coldly*) Do you realize how contemptible this confession makes you out? (*Angrily*) Why, if you had one trace of human kindness in you—one bit of unselfish love for your wife—one particle of pity for her suffering——

CURTIS. (*anguished*) I have—all the love and pity in the world for her! That's why I can't help hating—the cause of her suffering.

BIGELOW. Have you never thought that you might repay

Martha for giving up all her life to you by devoting the rest of yours to her?

CURTIS. (*bitterly*) She can be happy without me. She'll have this child—to take my place. (*Intensely*) You think I wouldn't give up my work for her? But I would! I'll stay here—do anything she wishes—if only we can make a new beginning again—together—*alone*!

BIGELOW. (*agitated*) Curt, for God's sake, don't return to that! Why, good God, man—even now—don't you realize what may be happening? And you can talk as if you were wishing——

CURTIS. (*fiercely*) I can't help but wish it!

BIGELOW. (*distractedly*) For the love of God, if you have such thoughts, keep them to yourself. (*The door in the rear is opened and JAYSON enters, pale and unnerved. A succession of quick, piercing shrieks is heard before he can close the door behind him. Shuddering*) My God! My God! (*With a fierce cry*) Will—this—never—end!

JAYSON. (*tremblingly*) Sh-h-h, they say this is the crisis. (*Puts his arm around CURTIS*) Bear up, my boy, it'll soon be over now. (*He sits down in the chair BIGELOW has vacated, pointedly ignoring the latter. The door is opened again and EMILY, ESTHER, JOHN and SHEFFIELD file in quickly as if escaping from the cries of the woman upstairs. They are all greatly agitated. CURTIS groans, pressing his clenched fists against his ears. The two women sit on the lounge. MARK comes forward and stands by JAYSON's chair, JOHN sits by the door as before. BIGELOW retreats behind CURTIS' chair, aware of their hostility. There is a long pause*).

ESTHER. (*suddenly*) She's stopped— (*They all listen*).

JAYSON. (*huskily*) Thank God, it's over at last. (*The door*

is opened and MRS. DAVIDSON enters. The old lady is radiant, weeping tears of joy).

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*calls out exultantly between sobs*) A son, Curt—a son. (*With rapt fervor—falling on her knees*) Let us all give thanks to God!

CURTIS. (*in a horrible cry of rage and anguish*) No! No! (*They all cry out in fright and amazement: "Curt!" The door is opened and the NURSE appears.*)

NURSE. (*looking at CURTIS in a low voice*) Mr. Jayson, your wife is asking for you.

BIGELOW. (*promptly slapping CURTIS on the back*) There! What did I tell you? Run, you chump!

CURTIS. (*with a gasp of joy*) Martha! (*He rushes out after the NURSE.*)

BIGELOW. (*comes forward to get his hat and coat from the sofa—coldly*) Pardon me, please. (*They shrink away from him.*)

EMILY. (*as he goes to the door—cuttingly*) Some people seem to have no sense of decency!

BIGELOW. (*stung, stops at the door and looks from one to the other of them—bitingly*) No, I quite agree with you. (*He goes out, shutting the door. They all gasp angrily.*)

JOHN. Scoundrel!

JAYSON. (*testily—going to MRS. D., who is still on her knees praying*) Do get up, Aunt Elizabeth! How ridiculous! What a scene if anyone should see you like that. (*He raises her to her feet and leads her to a chair by the fire. She obeys unresistingly, seemingly unaware of what she is doing.*)

ESTHER. (*unable to restrain her jealousy*) So it's a boy.

EMILY. Did you hear Curt—how he yelled out "No"? It's plain as the nose on your face he didn't want—

ESTHER. How awful!

JOHN. Well, can you blame him?

EMILY. And the awful cheek of that Bigelow person—coming here——

ESTHER. They appeared as friendly as ever when we came in.

JOHN. (*scornfully*) Curt is a blind simpleton—and that man is a dyed-in-the-wool scoundrel.

JAYSON. (*frightenedly*) Shhh! Suppose we were overheard!

EMILY. When Curt leaves we can put her in her proper place. I'll soon let her know she hasn't fooled me, for one. (*While she is speaking MRS. D. has gotten up and is going silently toward the door*).

JAYSON. (*testily*) Aunt Elizabeth, where are you going?

MRS. D. (*tenderly*) I must see him again, the dear! (*She goes out*).

ESTHER. (*devoured by curiosity—hesitatingly*) I think I—come on, Emily. Let's go up and see——

EMILY. Not I! I never want to lay eyes on it.

JOHN. Nor I.

ESTHER. I was only thinking—everyone will think it funny if we don't.

JAYSON. (*hastily*) Yes, yes. We must keep up appearances. (*Getting to his feet*) Yes, I think we had better all go up—make some sort of inquiry about Martha, you know. It's expected of us and—— (*They are all standing, hesitating, when the door in the rear is opened and the NURSE appears, supporting CURTIS. The latter is like a corpse. His face is petrified with grief, his body seems limp and half-paralyzed*).

NURSE. (*her eyes flashing, indignantly*) It's a wonder some of you wouldn't come up—here, help me! Take him, can't you?

I've got to run back! (JAYSON and SHEFFIELD spring forward and lead CURTIS to a chair by the fire).

JAYSON. (*anxiously*) Curt! Curt, my boy! What is it, son?

EMILY. (*catching the NURSE as she tries to go*) Nurse! What is the matter?

NURSE. (*slowly*) His wife is dead. (*They are all still, stunned*) She lived just long enough to recognize him.

EMILY. And—the baby?

NURSE. (*with a professional air*) Oh, it's a fine, healthy baby—eleven pounds—that's what made it so difficult. (*She goes. The others all stand in silence*).

ESTHER. (*suddenly sinking on the couch and bursting into tears*) Oh, I'm so sorry I said—or thought—anything wrong about her. Forgive me, Martha!

SHEFFIELD. (*honestly moved but unable to resist this opportunity for Latin—solemnly*) De mortuis nil nisi bonum.

JAYSON. (*who has been giving all his attention to his son*) Curt! Curt!

EMILY. Hadn't the doctor better——

JAYSON. Shhh! He begins to recognize me. Curt!

CURTIS. (*looking around him bewilderedly*) Yes. (*Suddenly remembrance comes and a spasm of intolerable pain contracts his features. He presses his hands to the side of his head and groans brokenly*) Martha! (*He appeals wildly to the others*) Her eyes—she knew me—she smiled—she whispered—forgive me, Curt,—forgive her—when it was I who should have said forgive me—but before I could—she—— (*He falters brokenly*).

EMILY. (*looking from one to the other meaningly as if this justified all their suspicions*) Oh!

CURTIS. (*a sudden triumph in his voice*) But she loved me

again—only me—I saw it in her eyes! She had forgotten—*it*.
(Raging) It has murdered her! *(Springing to his feet)* I
 hate it—I will never see it—never—never—I take my oath!
(As his father takes his arm—shaking him off) Let me go!
 I am going back to her! *(He strides out of the door in a
 frenzy of grief and rage. They all stand transfixed, looking at
 each other bewilderedly).*

EMILY. *(putting all her venomous gratification into one
 word)* Well!

(The Curtain Falls)

ACT FOUR

SCENE. *Same as Act One. It is afternoon of a fine day three days later. Motors are heard coming up the drive in front of the house. There is the muffled sound of voices. The MAID is seen going along the hall to the front door. Then the family enter from the rear. First come JAYSON and ESTHER with MRS. DAVIDSON—then LILY, DICK and SHEFFIELD—then JOHN and his wife. All are dressed in mourning. The only one who betrays any signs of sincere grief is MRS. DAVIDSON. The others all have a strained look, irritated, worried, or merely gloomy. They seem to be thinking "The worst is yet to come."*

JAYSON. *(leading MRS. D., who is weeping softly, to the chair at left of table—fretfully)* Please do sit down, Aunt. *(She does so mechanically)* And do stop crying. *(He sits down in front of table. ESTHER goes to couch where she is joined by EMILY. MARK goes over and stands in back of them. DICK and JOHN sit at rear of table. LILY comes down front and walks about nervously. She seems in a particularly fretful, upset mood).*

LILY. *(trying to conceal her feelings under a forced flippancy)* What ridiculous things funerals are, anyway! That stupid minister—whining away through his nose! Why does the Lord show such a partiality for men with adenoids, I wonder!

JAYSON. *(testily)* Sshhh! Have you no respect for anything?

LILY. (*resentfully*) If I had, I'd have lost it when I saw all of you pulling such long faces in the church where you knew you were under observation. Pah! Such hypocrisy! And then, to cap it all, Emily has to force out a few crocodile tears at the grave!

EMILY. (*indignantly*) When I saw Curt—that's why I cried—not for her!

JAYSON. What a scene Curt made! I actually believe he wanted to throw himself into the grave!

DICK. You *believe* he wanted to! Why, it was all Mark and I could do to hold him, wasn't it, Mark? (*SHEFFIELD nods*).

JAYSON. I never expected he'd turn violent like that. He's seemed calm enough the past three days.

LILY. Calm! Yes, just like a corpse is calm!

JAYSON. (*distractedly*) And now this perfectly mad idea of going away today to join that infernal expedition—leaving that child on our hands—the child he has never even looked at! Why, it's too monstrously flagrant! He's deliberately flaunting this scandal in everyone's face!

JOHN. (*firmlly*) He must be brought to time.

SHEFFIELD. Yes, we must talk to him—quite openly, if we're forced to. After all, I guess he realizes the situation more keenly than any of us.

LILY. (*who has wandered to window on right*) You mean you think he believes— Well, I don't. And you had better be careful not to let him guess what you think. (*Pointing outside*) There's my proof. There he is walking about with Bigelow. Can you imagine Curt doing that—if he thought for a moment——

DICK. Oh, I guess Curt isn't all fool. He knows that's the very best way to keep people from suspecting.

ESTHER. (*indignantly*) But wouldn't you think that Bigelow person— It's disgusting, his sticking to Curt like this.

SHEFFIELD. Well, for one, I'm becoming quite resigned to Bigelow's presence. In the first place, he seems to be the only one who can bring Curt to reason. Then again, I feel that it is to Bigelow's own interest to convince Curt that he mustn't provoke an open scandal by running away without acknowledging this child.

LILY. (*suddenly bursting forth hysterically*) Oh, I hate you, all of you! I loathe your suspicions—and I loathe myself because I'm beginning to be poisoned by them, too.

EMILY. Really, Lily, at this late hour—after the way Curt has acted—and her last words when she was dying——

LILY. (*distractedly*) I know! Shut up! Haven't you told it a million times already? (*MRS. DAVIDSON gets up and walks to the door, rear. She has been crying softly during this scene, oblivious to the talk around her.*)

JAYSON. (*testily*) Aunt Elizabeth! Where are you going? (*As she doesn't answer but goes out into the hall*) Esther, go with her and see that she doesn't——

ESTHER. (*gets up with a jealous irritation*) She's only going up to see the baby. She's simply forgotten everything else in the world!

LILY. (*indignantly*) She probably realizes what we are too mean to remember—that the baby, at least, is innocent. Wait, Esther. I'll come with you.

JAYSON. Yes, hurry, she shouldn't be left alone. (*ESTHER and LILY follow the old lady out, rear.*)

DICK. (*after a pause—impatiently*) Well, what next? I don't see what good we are accomplishing. May I run along?

(*He gets up restlessly as he is speaking and goes to the window*).

JAYSON. (*severely*) You will stay, if you please. There's to be no shirking on anyone's part. It may take all of us to induce Curt——

SHEFFIELD. I wouldn't worry. Bigelow is taking that job off our hands, I imagine.

DICK. (*looking out of the window*) He certainly seems to be doing his damndest. (*With a sneer*) The stage missed a great actor in him.

JAYSON. (*worriedly*) But, if Bigelow should fail——

SHEFFIELD. Then we'll succeed. (*With a grim smile*) By God, we'll have to.

JAYSON. Curt has already packed his trunks and had them taken down to the station—told me he was leaving on the five o'clock train.

SHEFFIELD. But didn't you hint to him there was now this matter of the child to be considered in making his plans?

JAYSON. (*lamely*) I started to. He simply flared up at me with insane rage.

DICK. (*looking out the window*) Say, I believe they're coming in.

JAYSON. Bigelow?

DICK. Yes, they're both making for the front door.

SHEFFIELD. I suggest we beat a retreat to Curt's study and wait there.

JAYSON. Yes, let's do that—come on, all of you. (*They all retire grumblingly but precipitately to the study, closing the door behind them. The front door is heard opening and a moment later CURTIS and BIGELOW enter the room. CURTIS' face is*

set in an expression of stony grief. BIGELOW is flushed, excited, indignant).

BIGELOW. (*as CURTIS sinks down on the couch—pleading indignantly*) Curt, damn it, wake up! Are you made of stone? Has everything I've said gone in one ear and out the other? I know it's hell for me to torment you at this particular time but it's your own incredibly unreasonable actions that force me to. I know how terribly you must feel but—damn it, man, postpone this going away! Face this situation like a man! Be reconciled to your child, stay with him at least until you can make suitable arrangements——

CURTIS. (*fixedly*) I will never see it! Never!

BIGELOW. How can you keep repeating that—with Martha hardly cold in her grave! I ask you again, what would she think, how would she feel— If you would only consent to see this baby, I know you'd realize how damnably mad and cruel you are. Won't you—just for a second?

CURTIS. No. (*Then raging*) If I saw it I'd be tempted to— (*Then brokenly*) No more of that talk, Big. I've heard enough. I've reached the limit.

BIGELOW. (*restraining his anger with difficulty—coldly*) That's your final answer, eh? Well, I'm through. I've done all I could. If you want to play the brute—to forget all that was most dear in the world to Martha—to go your own damn selfish way—well, there's nothing more to be said. (*He takes a step toward the door*) And I—I want you to understand that all friendship ceases between us from this day. You're not the Curt I thought I knew—and I have nothing but a feeling of repulsion—good-by. (*He starts for the door*).

CURTIS. (*dully*) Good-by, Big.

BIGELOW. (*stops, his features working with grief, and looks*

back at his friend—then suddenly goes back to him—penitently) Curt! Forgive me! I ought to know better. This isn't you. You'll come to yourself when you've had time to think it over. The memory of Martha—she'll tell you what you must do. (*He wrings CURTIS' hand*) Good-by, old scout!

CURTIS. (*dully*) Good-by. (*BIGELOW hurries out, rear. CURTIS sits in a dumb apathy for a while—then groans heart-brokenly*) Martha! Martha! (*He springs to his feet distractedly. The door of the study is slowly opened and SHEFFIELD peers out cautiously—then comes into the room, followed by the others. They all take seats as before. CURTIS ignores them*).

SHEFFIELD. (*clearing his throat*) Curt——

CURTIS. (*suddenly*) What time is it, do you know!

SHEFFIELD. (*looking at his watch*) Two minutes to four.

CURTIS. (*impatiently*) Still an hour more of this!

JAYSON. (*clearing his throat*) Curt—— (*Before he starts what he intends to say, there is the sound of voices from the hall. ESTHER and LILY help in MRS. DAVIDSON to her former chair. The old lady's face is again transformed with joy. ESTHER joins EMILY on the couch. LILY sits in chair—front right. There is a long, uncomfortable pause during which CURTIS paces up and down*).

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*suddenly murmuring aloud to herself—happily*) He's such a dear! I could stay watching him forever.

JAYSON. (*testily*) Sshhh! Aunt! (*Then clearing his throat again*) Surely you're not still thinking of going on the five o'clock train, are you, Curt?

CURTIS. Yes.

SHEFFIELD. (*dryly*) Then Mr. Bigelow didn't persuade you——

CURTIS. (*coldly and impatiently*) I'm not to be persuaded by Big or anyone else. And I'll thank you not to talk any more about it. (*They all stiffen resentfully at his tone*).

JAYSON. (*to CURTIS—in a pleading tone*) You mustn't be unreasonable, Curt. After all we are your family—your best friends in the world—and we are only trying to help you—

CURTIS. (*with nervous vehemence*) I don't want your help. You'll help me most by keeping silent.

EMILY. (*with a meaning look at the others—sneeringly*) Yes, no doubt.

ESTHER. Sshhh, Emily!

JAYSON. (*helplessly*) But, you see, Curt——

SHEFFIELD. (*with his best judicial air*) If you'll all allow me to be the spokesman, I think perhaps that I— (*They all nod and signify their acquiescence*) Well, then, will you listen to me, Curt? (*This last somewhat impatiently as CURTIS continues to pace, eyes on the floor*).

CURTIS. (*without looking at him—harshly*) Yes, I'm listening. What else can I do when you've got me cornered? Say what you like and let's get this over.

SHEFFIELD. First of all, Curt, I hope it is needless for me to express how very deeply we all feel for you in your sorrow. But we sincerely trust that you are aware of our heartfelt sympathy. (*They all nod. A bitter, cynical smile comes over LILY's face*).

ESTHER. (*suddenly breaking down and beginning to weep*) Poor Martha! (*SHEFFIELD glances at his wife, impatient at this interruption. The others also show their irritation*).

EMILY. (*pettishly*) Esther! For goodness' sake! (*CURTIS hesitates, stares at his sister frowningly as if judging her sincerity—then bends down over her and kisses the top of her*

bowed head impulsively—seems about to break down himself—grits his teeth and forces it back—glances around at the others defiantly and resumes his pacing. ESTHER dries her eyes).

SHEFFIELD. (*clearing his throat*) I may truthfully say we all feel—as Esther does—even if we do not give vent— (*With an air of sincere sympathy*) I know how terrible a day this must be for you, Curt. We all do. And we feel guilty in breaking in upon the sanctity of your sorrow in any way. But, if you will pardon my saying so, your own course of action—the suddenness of your plans—have made it imperative that we come to an understanding about certain things—about one thing in particular, I might say. (*He pauses. CURTIS goes on pacing back and forth as if he hadn't heard*).

JAYSON. (*placatingly*) Yes, it is for the best, Curt.

ESTHER. Yes, Curt dear, you mustn't be unreasonable.

DICK. (*feeling called upon to say something*) Yes, old man, you've got to face things like a regular. Facts are facts. (*This makes everybody uneasy*).

LILY. (*springing to her feet*) Phew! it's close in here. I'm going out in the garden. You can call me when these—orations—are finished. (*She sweeps out scornfully*).

JAYSON. (*calling after her imperiously*) Lily! (*But she doesn't answer and he gives it up with a hopeless sigh*).

CURTIS. (*harshly*) What time is it?

SHEFFIELD. You have plenty of time to listen to what I—I should rather say we—have to ask you, Curt. I promise to be brief. But first let me again impress upon you that I am talking in a spirit of the deepest friendliness and sympathy with you—as a fellow-member of the same family, I may say—and with the highest ideals and the honor of that family always in view. (*CURTIS makes no comment. SHEFFIELD unconsciously be-*

gins to adopt the alert keenness of the cross-examiner) First, let me ask you, is it your intention to take that five o'clock train today?

CURTIS. (*harshly*) I've told you that.

SHEFFIELD. And then you'll join this expedition to Asia?

CURTIS. You know that.

SHEFFIELD. To be gone five years?

CURTIS. (*shrugging his shoulders*) More or less.

SHEFFIELD. Is it your intention to return here at any time before you leave for Asia?

CURTIS. No!

SHEFFIELD. And your determination on these plans is irrevocable?

CURTIS. Irrevocable! Exactly. Please remember that.

SHEFFIELD. (*sharply*) That being your attitude, I will come bluntly to the core of the whole matter—the child whose coming into the world cost Martha her life.

CURTIS. (*savagely*) Her murderer! (*They all look shocked, suspicious*).

SHEFFIELD. (*remonstratingly but suspiciously*) You can hardly hold the child responsible for the terrible outcome. Women die every day from the same cause. (*Keenly*) Why do you attribute guilt to the child in this case, Curt?

CURTIS. It lives and Martha is gone— But I've said I never wanted it mentioned to me. Will you please remember that?

SHEFFIELD. (*sharply*) Its name is Jayson, Curt—in the eyes of the law. Will you please remember that?

CURTIS. (*distractedly*) I don't want to remember anything! (*Wildly*) Please, for God's sake, leave me alone!

SHEFFIELD. (*coldly*) I am sorry, Curt, but you can't act as if you were alone in this affair.

CURTIS. Why not? Am I not alone—more alone this minute than any creature on God's earth?

SHEFFIELD. (*soothingly*) In your great grief. Yes, yes, of course. We all appreciate—and we hate to— (*Persuasively*) Yes, it would be much wiser to postpone these practical considerations until you are in a calmer mood. And if you will only give us the chance—why not put off this precipitate departure—for a month, say—and in the meantime——

CURTIS. (*harshly*) I am going when I said I was. I must get away from this horrible hole—as far away as I can. I must get back to my work for only in it will I find Martha again. But you—you can't understand that. What is the good of all this talking which leads nowhere?

SHEFFIELD. (*coldly*) You're mistaken. It leads to this: Do you understand that your running away from this child—on the very day of its mother's funeral!—will have a very queer appearance in the eyes of the world?

EMILY. And what are you going to do with the baby, Curt? Do you think you can run off regardless and leave it here—on our hands?

CURTIS. (*distractedly*) I'll give it this home. And someone—anyone—Esther, Lily—can appoint a nurse to live here and— (*Breaking down*) Oh, don't bother me!

SHEFFIELD. (*sharply*) In the world's eyes, it will appear precious like a desertion on your part.

CURTIS. Oh, arrange it to suit yourselves—anything you wish——

SHEFFIELD. (*quickly*) I'll take you at your word. Then let us arrange it this way. You will remain here a month longer at least——

CURTIS. No!

SHEFFIELD. (*ignoring the interruption*) You can make plans for the child's future in that time, become reconciled to it——

CURTIS. No!

JAYSON. (*pleadingly*) Curt—please—for all our sakes—when the honor of the family is at stake.

DICK. Yes, old man, there's that about it, you know.

CURTIS. No.

EMILY. Oh, he's impossible!

SHEFFIELD. Perhaps Curt misunderstood me. (*Meaningly*) Be reconciled to it in the eyes of the public, Curt. That's what I meant. Your own private feelings in the matter—are no one's business but your own, of course.

CURTIS. (*bewilderedly*) But—I don't see— Oh, damn your eyes of the public!

EMILY. (*breaking in*) It's all very well for you to ignore what people in town think—you'll be in China or heaven knows where. The scandal won't touch you—but we've got to live here and have our position to consider.

CURTIS. (*mystified*) Scandal? What scandal? (*Then with a harsh laugh*) Oh, you mean the imbecile busy-bodies will call me an unnatural father. Well, let them! I suppose I am. But they don't know——

EMILY. (*spitefully*) Perhaps they know more than you think they do.

CURTIS. (*turning on her—sharply*) Just what do you mean by that, eh?

ESTHER. Emily! Shhh!

JAYSON. (*flurriedly*) Be still, Emily. Let Mark do the talking.

SHEFFIELD. (*interposing placatingly*) What Emily means is

simply this, Curt: You haven't even been to look at this child since it has been born—not once, have you?

CURTIS. No, and I never intend——

SHEFFIELD. (*insinuatingly*) And don't you suppose the doctors and nurses—and the servants—have noticed this? It is not the usual procedure, you must acknowledge, and they wouldn't be human if they didn't think your action—or lack of action—peculiar and comment on it outside.

CURTIS. Well, let them! Do you think I care a fiddler's curse how people judge me?

SHEFFIELD. It is hardly a case of their judging—you. (*Breaking off as he catches CURTIS' tortured eyes fixed on him wildly*) This is a small town, Curt, and you know as well as I do, gossip is not the least of its faults. It doesn't take long for such things to get started. (*Persuasively*) Now I ask you, frankly, is it wise to provoke deliberately what may easily be set at rest by a little—I'll be frank—a little pretense on your part?

JAYSON. Yes, my boy. As a Jayson, I know you don't wish——

ESTHER. (*with a sigh*) Yes, you really must think of us, Curt.

CURTIS. (*in an acute state of muddled confusion*) But—I—you—how are you concerned? Pretense? You mean you want me to stay and pretend—in order that you won't be disturbed by any silly tales they tell about me? (*With a wild laugh*) Good God, this is too much! Why does a man have to be mad-denied by fools at such a time! (*Raging*) Leave me alone! You're like a swarm of poisonous flies.

JAYSON. Curt! This is—really—when we've tried to be so considerate——

JOHN. (*bursting with rage*) It's an outrage to allow such insults!

DICK. You're not playing the game, Curt.

EMILY. (*spitefully*) It seems to me it's much more for Martha's sake, we're urging you than for our own. After all, the town can't say anything against us.

CURTIS. (*turning on her*) Martha's sake? (*Brokenly*) Martha is gone. Leave her out of this.

SHEFFIELD. (*sharply*) But unfortunately, Curt, others will not leave her out of this. They will pry and pry—you know what they are—and——

EMILY. Curt couldn't act the way he is doing if he ever really cared for her.

CURTIS. You dare to say that! (*Then controlling himself a bit—with scathing scorn*) What do you know of love—women like you! You call your little rabbit-hutch emotions love—your bread-and-butter passions—and you have the effrontery to judge——

EMILY. (*shrinking from him frightenedly*) Oh! John!

JOHN. (*getting to his feet*) I protest! I cannot allow even my own brother——

DICK. (*grabbing his arm*) Keep your head, old boy.

SHEFFIELD. (*peremptorily*) You are making a fool of yourself, Curt—and you are damned insulting in the bargain. I think I may say that we've all about reached the end of our patience. What Emily said is for your own best interest, if you had the sense to see it. And I put it to you once and for all: Are you or are you not willing to act like a man of honor to protect your own good name, the family name, the name of this child, and your wife's memory? Let me tell you, your

wife's good name is more endangered by your stubbornness than anything else.

CURTIS. (*trembling with rage*) I—I begin to think—you—all of you—are aiming at something against Martha in this. Yes—in back of your words—your actions—I begin to feel—(*Raging*) Go away! Get out of this house—all of you! Oh, I know your meanness! I've seen how you've tried to hurt her ever since we came—because you resented in your small minds her evident superiority——

EMILY. (*scornfully*) Superiority, indeed!

CURTIS. Her breadth of mind and greatness of soul that you couldn't understand. I've guessed all this, and if I haven't interfered it's only because I knew she was too far above you to notice your sickening malice——

EMILY. (*furiously*) You're only acting—acting for our benefit because you think we don't——

CURTIS. (*turning on her—with annihilating contempt*) Why, you—you poor little nonentity! (*JOHN struggles to get forward but DICK holds him back*).

EMILY. (*insane with rage—shrilly*) But we know—and the whole town knows—and you needn't pretend you've been blind. You've given the whole thing away yourself—the silly way you've acted—telling everyone how you hated that baby—letting everyone see——

JAYSON. Emily! (*The others are all frightened, try to interrupt her. CURTIS stares at her in a stunned bewilderment*).

EMILY. (*pouring forth all her venom regardless*) But you might as well leave off your idiotic pretending. It doesn't fool us—or anyone else—your sending for Bigelow that night—your hobnobbing with him ever since—your pretending he's as much your friend as ever. They're all afraid of you—but I'm not! I

tell you to your face—it's all acting you're doing—just cheap acting to try and pull the wool over our eyes until you've run away like a coward—and left us to face the disgrace for you with this child on our hands!

ESTHER. (*trying to silence her—excitedly*) Emily! Keep still, for Heaven's sake! (*The others all utter exclamations of caution, with fearful glances at CURTIS*).

EMILY. (*becoming exhausted by her outburst—more faintly*) Well, someone had to show him his place. He thinks he's so superior to us just because—telling us how much better she was than— But I won't stand for that. I've always had a clean name—and always will—and my children, too, thank God! (*She sinks down on the couch exhausted, panting but still glaring defiantly at CURTIS*).

CURTIS. (*an awareness of her meaning gradually forcing itself on his mind*) Bigelow! Big? Pretending he's as much my friend— (*With a sudden gasp of sickened understanding*) Oh! (*He sways as if he were about to fall, shrinking away from EMILY, all horror*) Oh, you—you—you—filth!

JOHN. (*his fists clenched, tries to advance on his brother*) How dare you insult my wife! (*He is restrained, held back by his remonstrating father and DICK*).

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*as if suddenly coming out of a dream—frightenedly*) What is the matter? Why is John mad at Curt?

CURTIS. (*his hands over his eyes, acting like a person stricken with a sudden attack of nausea, weakly*) So—that's—what has been in your minds. Oh, this is bestial—disgusting! And there is nothing to be done. I feel defenseless. One would have to be as low as you are— She would have been defenseless, too. It is better she's dead. (*He stares about him—wildly*) And you think—you all think—

ESTHER. (*pityingly*) Curt, dear, we don't think anything except what you've made us think with your crazy carrying-on.

CURTIS. (*looking from one to the other of them*) Yes—all of you—it's on your faces. (*His eyes fix themselves on his aunt*) No, you don't—you don't——

MRS. DAVIDSON. I? Don't what, Curtis? My, how sick you look, poor boy!

CURTIS. You don't believe—this child——

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*proudly*) He's the sweetest baby I ever saw!

CURTIS. Ah, I know you—— (*Looking around at the others with loathing and hatred*) But look at them—— (*With a burst of fierce determination*) Wait! I'll give you the only answer—— (*He dashes for the door in rear, shakes off his father and DICK, who try to stop him, and then is heard bounding up the stairs in hall. DICK runs after him, JAYSON as far as the doorway. ESTHER gives a stifled scream. There is a tense pause. Then DICK reappears*).

DICK. It's all right. I saw him go in.

JAYSON. (*frightenedly*) But—good God—he's liable—why didn't you follow him?

DICK. The doctor and nurse are there. They would have called out, wouldn't they, if——

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*getting angrier and angrier as her puzzlement has grown greater—in a stern tone*) I understand less and less of this. Where has Curtis gone? Why did he act so sick? What is the matter with all of you?

ESTHER. Nothing, Aunt dear, nothing!

MRS. DAVIDSON. No, you'll not hush me up! (*Accusingly*) You all look guilty. Have you been saying anything against

Curtis' baby? That was what Curtis seemed to think. A fine time you've picked out—with his wife not cold in her grave!

JAYSON. Aunt!

MRS. DAVIDSON. I never liked that woman. I never understood her. But now—now I love her and beg her forgiveness. She died like a true woman in the performance of her duty. She died gloriously—and I will always respect her memory. (*Suddenly flying into a passion*) I feel that you are all hostile to her baby—poor, little, defenseless creature! Yes, you'd hate the idea of Curtis' having a son—you and your girls! Well, I'll make you bitterly regret the day you—— (*She plumps herself down in her chair again, staring stubbornly and angrily before her*).

EMILY. (*spitefully*) I fear it will be necessary to tell Aunt——

JAYSON. Sshh! You have made enough trouble with your telling already! (*Miserably*) It should never have come to this pass. Curt will never forgive us, never!

ESTHER. (*resentfully to EMILY*) See what not holding your tongue has done—and my children will have to suffer for it, too!

SHEFFIELD. (*severely*) If Emily had permitted me to conduct this business uninterruptedly, this would never have occurred.

EMILY. That's right! All pick on me! Cowards! (*She breaks down and sobs*).

DICK. (*from the doorway. Coming back into the room*) Sstt! Here he comes!

CURTIS. (*Reënters. There is a look of strange exultation on his face. He looks from one to the other of them. He stammers*) Well—my answer to you—your rotten world—I kissed

him—he's mine! He looked at me—it was as if Martha looked at me—through his eyes.

ESTHER. (*voicing the general relief. Joyfully*) Oh, Curt! You won't go now? You'll stay?

CURTIS. (*staring at her, then from one to another of the rest with a withering scorn*) Ha! Now you think you've conquered, do you? No, I'm not going to stay. Do you think your vile slander could influence me to give up my work? And neither shall you influence the life of my son. I leave him here. I must. But not to your tender mercies. No, no! Thank God, there still remains one Jayson with unclouded integrity to whom I can appeal. (*He goes to MRS. DAVIDSON*) I'll leave him in your care, Aunt—while I'm gone.

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*delighted*) It will be a great happiness. He will be—the one God never granted me. (*Her lips trembling*) God has answered my prayer at last.

CURTIS. I thank you, Aunt. (*Kisses her reverentially*).

MRS. DAVIDSON. (*pleased but morally bound to grumble at him*) But I cannot approve of your running away like this. It isn't natural. (*Then with selfish haste, fearing her words may change his mind and she will lose the baby*) But you always were a queer person—and a man must do faithfully the work ordained for him.

CURTIS. (*gladly*) Yes, I must go! What good would I be for him—or anyone—if I stayed? Thank God, you understand. But I'll come back. (*The light of an ideal beginning to shine in his eyes*) When he's old enough, I'll teach him to know and love a big, free life. Martha used to say that he would take her place in time. Martha shall live again for me in him. And you, Aunt, swear to keep him with you—out there in the country

—never to let him know this obscene little world. (*He indicates his relatives*).

MRS. DAVIDSON. Yes, I promise, Curtis. Let anyone dare——! (*She glares about her. The noise of a motor is heard from the drive. It stops in front of the house*).

CURTIS. I must go. (*He kisses his aunt*) Teach him his mother was the most beautiful soul that ever lived. Good-by, Aunt.

MRS. DAVIDSON. Good-by, Curtis! (*Without looking at the others, he starts for the door, rear. They all break out into conscience-stricken protestations*).

JAYSON. (*miserably*) Curt! You're not leaving us that way?

ESTHER. Curt—you're going—without a word! (*They all say this practically together and crowd toward him. JOHN and EMILY remain sullenly apart. CURTIS turns to face them*).

LILY. (*enters from the rear*) You're not going, Curt?

CURTIS. (*turning to her*) Yes. Good-by, Lily. (*He kisses her*) You loved her, didn't you? You're not like—— Take my advice and get away before you become—— (*He has been staring into her face. Suddenly he pushes her brusquely away from him—coldly*) But I see in your face it's too late.

LILY. (*Miserably*) No Curt—I swear——

CURTIS. (*facing them all defiantly*) Yes, I am going without a word—because I can't find the fitting one. Be thankful I can't. (*He again turns and strides to the door*).

JAYSON. (*his grief overcoming him*) My boy! We are wrong—we know—but—at least say you forgive us.

CURTIS. (*wavers with his back towards them—then turns and forces the words out*) Ask forgiveness of her. She—yes—she was so fine—I feel she—so you are forgiven. Good-by. (*He*

goes. *The motor is heard driving off. There is a tense pause).*

LILY. Then he did find out? Oh, a fine mess you've made of everything! But no—I should say "we," shouldn't I? Curt guessed that. Oh, I hate you—and myself! (*She breaks down*).

(*There is strained pause during which they are all silent, their eyes avoiding each other, fixed in dull, stupid stares. Finally, DICK fidgets uncomfortably, heaves a noisy sigh, and blurts out with an attempt at comforting reassurance:*)

DICK. Well, it isn't as bad as it might have been, anyway. He did acknowledge the kid—before witnesses, too.

JAYSON. (*testily*) Keep your remarks to yourself, if you please! (*But most of his family are already beginning to look relieved*).

(*The Curtain Falls*)

THE DREAMY KID

A Play in One Act

(1918)

CHARACTERS

MAMMY SAUNDERS

ABE, *her grandson, "The Dreamy Kid"*

CEELY ANN

IRENE

THE DREAMY KID

SCENE. *Mammy Saunders' bedroom in a house just off of Carmine Street, New York City. The left of the room, forward, is taken up by a heavy, old-fashioned wooden bedstead with a feather mattress. A gaudy red-and-yellow quilt covers the other bedclothes. In back of the bed, a chest of drawers placed against the left wall. On top of the chest, a small lamp. A rocking-chair stands beside the head of the bed on the right. In the rear wall, toward the right, a low window with ragged white curtains. In the right corner, a washstand with bowl and pitcher. Bottles of medicine, a spoon, a glass, etc., are also on the stand. Farther forward, a door opening on the hall and stairway.*

It is soon after nightfall of a day in early winter. The room is in shadowy half darkness, the only light being a pale glow that seeps through the window from the arc lamp on the nearby corner, and by which the objects in the room can be dimly discerned. The vague outlines of Mammy Saunders' figure lying in the bed can be seen, and her black face stands out in sharp contrast from the pillows that support her head.

MAMMY (*weakly*) Ceely Ann! (*With faint querulousness*) Light de lamp, will you? Hits mighty dark in yere. (*After a slight pause*) Ain't you dar, Ceely Ann? (*Receiving no reply she sighs deeply and her limbs move uneasily under the bedclothes. The door is opened and shut and the stooping form of another colored woman appears in the semi-darkness. She goes*

to the foot of the bed sobbing softly, and stands there evidently making an effort to control her emotion).

MAMMY. Dat you, Ceely Ann?

CEELY. (*huskily*) Hit ain't no yuther, Mammy.

MAMMY. Light de lamp, den. I can't see nowhars.

CEELY. Des one second till I finds a match. (*She wipes her eyes with her handkerchief—then goes to the chest of drawers and feels around on the top of it—pretending to grumble*) Hit beat all how dem pesky little sticks done hide umse'fs. Shoo! Yere dey is. (*She fumbles with the lamp*).

MAMMY. (*suspiciously*) You ain't been cryin,' is you?

CEELY. (*with feigned astonishment*) Cryin'? I clar' ter goodness you does git de mos' fool notions lyin' dar.

MAMMY. (*in a tone of relief*) I mos' thought I yeard you.

CEELY. (*lighting the lamp*) 'Deed you ain't. (*The two women are revealed by the light. MAMMY SAUNDERS is an old, white-haired negress about ninety with a weazened face furrowed by wrinkles and withered by old age and sickness. Ceely is a stout woman of fifty or so with gray hair and a round fat face. She wears a loose-fitting gingham dress and a shawl thrown over her head*).

CEELY. (*with attempted cheeriness*) Bless yo' soul, I ain't got nothin' to cry 'bout. Yere. Lemme fix you so you'll rest mo' easy. (*She lifts the old woman gently and fixes the pillows*) Dere. Now, ain't you feelin' better?

MAMMY. (*dully*) My strenk don' all went. I can't lift a hand.

CEELY. (*hurriedly*) Dat'll all come back ter you de doctor tole me des now when I goes down to de door with him. (*Glibly*) He say you is de mos' strongest 'oman fo' yo years ever he sees in de worl'; and he tell me you gwine ter be up and

walkin' agin fo' de week's out. (*As she finds the old woman's eyes fixed on her she turns away confusedly and abruptly changes the subject*) Hit ain't too wa'm in dis room, dat's a fac'.

MAMMY. (*shaking her head—in a half whisper*) No, Ceely Ann. Hit ain't no use'n you tellin' me nothin' but de trufe. I feels mighty poo'ly. En I knows hit's on'y wid de blessin' er God I kin las' de night out.

CEELY. (*distractedly*) Ain't no sich a thing! Hush yo' noise, Mammy!

MAMMY. (*as if she hadn't heard—in a crooning sing-song*) I'se gwine soon fum dis wicked yearth—and may de Lawd have mercy on dis po' ole sinner. (*After a pause—anxiously*) All I'se prayin' fer is dat God don' take me befo' I sees Dreamy agin. Whar's Dreamy, Ceely Ann? Why ain't he come yere? Ain't you done sent him word I'se sick like I tole you?

CEELY. I tole dem boys ter tell him speshul, and dey swar dey would soon's dey find him. I s'pose dey ain't kotch him yit. Don' you pester yo'se'f worryin'. Dreamy 'ull come fo' ve'y long.

MAMMY. (*after a pause—weakly*) Dere's a feelin' in my haid like I was a-floatin' yander whar I can't see nothin', or 'member nothin', or know de sight er any pusson I knows; en I wants ter see Dreamy agin befo'—

CEELY. (*quickly*) Don' waste yo strenk talkin'. You git a wink er sleep en I wake you when he comes, you heah me?

MAMMY. (*faintly*) I does feel mighty drowsy. (*She closes her eyes. CEELY goes over to the window and pulling the curtains aside stands looking down into the street as if she were watching for someone coming. A moment later there is a noise*

of footfalls from the stairs in the hall, followed by a sharp rap on the door).

CEELY. (*turning quickly from the window*) Ssshh! Ssshh! (*She hurries to the door, glancing anxiously toward MAMMY. The old woman appears to have fallen asleep. CEELY cautiously opens the door a bare inch or so and peeks out. When she sees who it is she immediately tries to slam it shut again but a vigorous shove from the outside forces her back and IRENE pushes her way defiantly into the room. She is a young, good-looking negress, highly rouged and powdered, dressed in gaudy, cheap finery*).

IRENE. (*in a harsh voice—evidently worked up to a great state of nervous excitement*) No you don't, Ceely Ann! I said I was comin' here and it'll take mo'n you to stop me!

CEELY. (*almost speechless with horrified indignation—breathing heavily*) Yo' bad 'oman! Git back ter yo' bad-house whar yo' b'longs!

IRENE. (*raising her clenched hand—furiously*) Stop dat talkin' to me, nigger, or I'll split yo' fool head! (*As CEELY shrinks away IRENE lowers her hand and glances quickly around the room*) Whar's Dreamy?

CEELY. (*scornfully*) Yo' ax me dat! Whar's Dreamy? Ax yo'se'f. Yo's de one ought ter know whar he is.

IRENE. Den he ain't come here?

CEELY. I ain't tellin' de likes er you wedder he is or not.

IRENE. (*pleadingly*) Tell me, Ceely Ann, ain't he been here? He'd be sure to come here 'count of Mammy dyin', dey said.

CEELY. (*pointing to MAMMY—apprehensively*) Ssshh! (*Then lowering her voice to a whisper—suspiciously*) Dey said? Who said?

IRENE. (*equally suspicious*) None o' your business who said. (*Then pleading again*) Ceely Ann, I jest got ter see him dis minute, dis secon'! He's in bad, Dreamy is, and I knows somep'n I gotter tell him, somep'n I jest heard——

CEELY. (*uncomprehendingly*) In bad? What you jest heah?

IRENE. I ain't tellin' no one but him. (*Desperately*) For Gawd's sake, tell me whar he is, Ceely!

CEELY. I don' know no mo'n you.

IRENE. (*fiercely*) You's lyin', Ceely! You's lyin' ter me jest 'cause I'se bad.

CEELY. De good Lawd bar witness I'se tellin' you de trufe!

IRENE. (*hopelessly*) Den I gotter go find him, high and low, somewheres. (*Proudly*) You ain't got de right not ter trust me, Ceely, where de Dreamy's mixed in it. I'd go ter hell for Dreamy!

CEELY. (*indignantly*) Hush yo' wicked cussin'! (*Then anxiously*) Is Dreamy in trouble?

IRENE. (*with a scornful laugh*) Trouble? Good Lawd, it's worser'n dat! (*Then in surprise*) Ain't you heerd what de Dreamy done last night, Ceely?

CEELY. (*apprehensively*) What de Dreamy do? Tell me, gal. Somep'n bad?

IRENE. (*with the same scornful laugh*) Bad? Worser'n bad, what he done!

CEELY. (*lamenting querulously*) Oh good Lawd, I knowed it! I knowed with all his carryin's-on wid dat passel er tough young niggers—him so uppity 'cause he's de boss er de gang—sleepin' all de day 'stead er workin' an' Lawd knows what he does in de nights—fightin' wid white folks, an' totin' a pistol in his pocket—(*With a glance of angry resentment at IRENE*)—an' as fo' de udder company he's been keepin'——

IRENE. (*fiercely*) Shut your mouth, Ceely! Dat ain't your business.

CEELY. Oh, I knowed Dreamy'd be gittin' in trouble fo' long! De lowflung young trash! An' here's his ole Mammy don' know no dif'frunt but he's de mos' innercent young lamb in de worl'. (*In a strained whisper*) What he do? Is he been stealin' somep'n?

IRENE. (*angrily*) You go ter hell, Ceely Ann! You ain't no fren' of de Dreamy's, you talk dat way, and I ain't got no time ter waste argyin' wid your fool notions. (*She goes to the door*) Dreamy'll go ter his death sho's yo' born, if I don't find him an' tell him quick!

CEELY. (*terrified*) Oh Lawd!

IRENE. (*anxiously*) He'll sho'ly try ter come here and see his ole Mammy befo' she dies, don't you think, Ceely?

CEELY. Fo' Gawd I hopes so! She's been a-prayin' all de day——

IRENE. (*opening the door*) You hopes so, you fool nigger! I tells you it's good-by to de Dreamy, he come here! I knows! I gotter find an' stop him. If he come here, Ceely, you tell him git out quick and hide, he don't wanten git pinched. You hear? You tell him dat, Ceely, for Gawd's sake! I'se got ter go—find him—high an' low. (*She goes out leaving CEELY staring at her in speechless indignation*).

CEELY. (*drawing a deep breath*) Yo' street gal! I don' b'lieve one word you says—stuffin' me wid yo' bad lies so's you kin keep de Dreamy frum leavin' you! (MAMMY SAUNDERS awakes and groans faintly. CEELY hurries over to her bedside) Is de pain hurtin' agin, Mammy?

MAMMY. (*vaguely*) Dat you, Dreamy?

CEELY. No, Mammy, dis is Ceely. Dreamy's comin' soon. Is you restin' easy?

MAMMY. (*as if she hadn't heard*) Dat you, Dreamy?

CEELY. (*sitting down in the rocker by the bed and taking one of the old woman's hands in hers*) No. Dreamy's comin'.

MAMMY. (*after a pause—suddenly*) Does you 'member yo' dead Mammy, chile?

CEELY. (*mystified*) My dead Mammy?

MAMMY. Didn' I heah yo' talkin' jest now, Dreamy?

CEELY. (*very worried*) I clar ter goodness, she don' know me ary bit. Dis is Ceely Ann talkin' ter yo', Mammy.

MAMMY. Who was yo' talkin' wid, Dreamy?

CEELY. (*shaking her head—in a trembling voice*) Hit can't be long befo' de en'. (*In a louder tone*) Hit was me talkin' wid a pusson fum ovah de way. She say tell you Dreamy comin' heah ter see yo' right away. You heah dat, Mammy? (*The old woman sighs but does not answer. There is a pause.*)

MAMMY. (*suddenly*) Does yo' 'member yo' dead Mammy, chile? (*Then with a burst of religious exaltation*) De Lawd have mercy!

CEELY. (*like an echo*) Bless de Lawd! (*Then in a frightened half-whisper to herself*) Po' thing! Her min's done leavin' her jest like de doctor said. (*She looks down at the old woman helplessly. The door on the right is opened stealthily and the DREAMY KID slinks in on tiptoe.*)

CEELY. (*hearing a board creak, turns quickly toward the door and gives a frightened start*) Dreamy!

DREAMY. (*puts his fingers to his lips—commandingly*) Ssshh! (*He bends down to a crouching position and holding the door about an inch open, peers out into the hallway in an attitude of tense waiting, one hand evidently clutching some*

weapon in the side pocket of his coat. After a moment he is satisfied of not being followed, and, after closing the door carefully and locking it, he stands up and walks to the center of the room casting a look of awed curiosity at the figure in the bed. He is a well-built, good-looking young negro, light in color. His eyes are shifty and hard, their expression one of tough, scornful defiance. His mouth is cruel and perpetually drawn back at the corners into a snarl. He is dressed in well-fitting clothes of a flashy pattern. A light cap is pulled down on the side of his head).

CEELY. (*coming from the bed to meet him*) Bless de Lawd, here you is at las'!

DREAMY. (*with a warning gesture*) Nix on de loud talk! Talk low, can't yuh! (*He glances back at the door furtively—then continues with a sneer*) Yuh're a fine nut, Ceely Ann! What for you sendin' out all ober de town for me like you was crazy! D'yuh want ter git me in de cooler? Don' you know dey're after me for what I done last night?

CEELY. (*fearfully*) I heerd somep'n—but—what you done, Dreamy?

DREAMY. (*with an attempt at a careless bravado*) I croaked a guy, dat's what! A white man.

CEELY. (*in a frightened whisper*) What you mean—croaked?

DREAMY. (*boastfully*) I shot him dead, dat's what! (*As CEELY shrinks away from him in horror—resentfully*) Aw say, don' gimme none o' dem looks o' yourn. 'T'warn't my doin' nohow. He was de one lookin' for trouble. I wasn't seekin' for no mess wid him dat I could help. But he told folks he was gwine ter git me for a fac', and dat fo'ced my hand. I had ter git him ter pertect my own life. (*With cruel satisfaction*) And I got him right, you b'lieve me!

CEELY. (*putting her hands over her face with a low moan of terror*) May de good Lawd pardon yo' wickedness! Oh Lawd! What yo' po' ole Mammy gwine say if she hear tell—an' she never knowin' how bad you's got.

DREAMY. (*fiercely*) Hell! You ain't tole her, is you?

CEELY. Think I want ter kill her on the instant? An' I didn' know myse'f—what you done—till you tells me. (*Frightenedly*) Oh, Dreamy, what you gwine do now? How you gwine git away? (*Almost wailing*) Good Lawd, de perlice don' kotch you suah!

DREAMY. (*savagely*) Shut yo' loud mouth, damn you'! (*He stands tensely listening for some sound from the hall. After a moment he points to the bed*) Is Mammy sleepin'?

CEELY. (*tiptoes to the bed*) Seems like she is. (*She comes back to him*) Dat's de way wid her—sleep fo' a few minutes, den she wake, den sleep again.

DREAMY. (*scornfully*) Aw, dere ain't nothin' wrong wid her 'ceptin' she's ole. What yuh wantter send de word tellin' me she's croakin', and git me comin' here at de risk o' my life, and den find her sleepin'. (*Clenching his fist threateningly*) I gotter mind ter smash yo' face for playin' de damn fool and makin' me de goat. (*He turns toward the door*) Ain't no us'en me stayin' here when dey'll likely come lookin' for me. I'm gwine out where I gotta chance ter make my git-away. De boys is all fixin' it up for me. (*His hand on the doorknob*) When Mammy wakes, you tell her I couldn't wait, you hear?

CEELY. (*hurrying to him and grabbing his arm—pleadingly*) Don' yo' go now, Dreamy—not jest yit. Fo' de good Lawd's sake, don' you go befo' you speaks wid her! If yo' knew how she's been a-callin' an' a-prayin' for yo' all de day—

DREAMY. (*scornfully but a bit uncertainly*) Aw, she don'

need none o' me. What good kin I do watchin' her do a kip? It'd be dif'frunt if she was croakin' on de level.

CEELY. (*in an anguished whisper*) She's gwine wake up in a secon' an' den she call: "Dreamy. Whar's Dreamy?"—an' what I gwine tell her den? An' yo' Mammy is dyin', Dreamy, sho's fate! Her min' been wanderin' an' she don' even recernize me no mo', an' de doctor say when dat come it ain't but a sho't time befo' de en'. Yo' gotter stay wid yo' Mammy long 'nuff ter speak wid her, Dreamy. Yo' jest gotter stay wid her in her las' secon's on dis yearth when she's callin' ter yo'. (*With conviction as he hesitates*) Listen heah, yo' Dreamy! Yo' don' never git no bit er luck in dis worril ary agin, yo' leaves her now. De perlice gon' kotch yo' suah.

DREAMY. (*with superstitious fear*) Ssshh! Can dat bull, Ceely! (*Then boastfully*) I wasn't pinin' to beat it up here, git me? De boys was all persuadin' me not ter take de chance. It's takin' my life in my hands, dat's what. But when I heerd it was ole Mammy croakin' and axin' ter see me, I says ter myse'f: "Dreamy, you gotter make good wid old Mammy no matter what come—or you don' never git a bit of luck in yo' life no mo'." And I was game and come, wasn't I? Nary body in dis worril kin say de Dreamy ain't game ter de core, n'matter what. (*With sudden decision walks to the foot of the bed and stands looking down at MAMMY. A note of fear creeps into his voice*) Gawd, she's quiet 'nuff. Maybe she done passed away in her sleep like de ole ones does. You go see, Ceely; an' if she's on'y sleepin', you wake her up. I wanter speak wid her quick—an' den I'll make a break outa here. You make it fast, Ceely Ann, I tells yo'.

CEELY. (*bends down beside the bed*) Mammy! Mammy! Here's de Dreamy.

MAMMY. (*opens her eyes—drowsily and vaguely, in a weak voice*) Dreamy?

DREAMY. (*shuffling his feet and moving around the bed*). Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY. (*fastening her eyes on him with fascinated joy*) Dreamy! Hits yo'! (*Then uncertainly*) I ain't dreamin' nor seein' ha'n'ts, is I?

DREAMY. (*coming forward and taking her hand*) 'Deed I ain't no ghost. Here I is, sho' 'nuff.

MAMMY. (*clutching his hand tight and pulling it down on her breast—in an ecstasy of happiness*) Didn' I know you'd come! Didn' I say: "Dreamy ain't gwine let his ole Mammy die all lone by he'se'f an' him not dere wid her." I knows yo'd come. (*She starts to laugh joyously, but coughs and sinks back weakly*).

DREAMY. (*shudders in spite of himself as he realizes for the first time how far gone the old woman is—forcing a tone of joking reassurance*) What's dat foolishness I hears you talkin', Mammy? Wha' d'yuh mean pullin' dat bull 'bout croakin' on me? Shoo! Tryin' ter kid me, ain't you'? Shoo! You live ter plant de flowers on my grave, see if you don'.

MAMMY. (*sadly and very weakly*) I knows! I knows! Hit ain't long now. (*Bursting into a sudden weak hysteria*) Yo' stay heah, Dreamy! Yo' stay heah by me, yo' stay heah—till de good Lawd takes me home. Yo' promise me dat! Yo' do dat fo' po' ole Mammy, won't yo'?

DREAMY. (*uneasily*) 'Deed I will, Mammy, 'deed I will.

MAMMY. (*closing her eyes with a sigh of relief—calmly*)

Bless de Lawd for dat. Den I ain't skeered no mo'. (*She settles herself comfortably in the bed as if preparing for sleep*).

CEELY. (*in a low voice*) I gotter go home fo' a minute, Dreamy. I ain't been dere all de day and Lawd knows what happen. I'll be back yere befo' ve'y long.

DREAMY. (*his eyes fixed on MAMMY*) Aw right, beat it if yuh wanten. (*Turning to her—in a fierce whisper*) On'y don' be long. I can't stay here an' take dis risk, you hear?

CEELY. (*frightenedly*) I knows, chile. I come back, I swar! (*She goes out quietly. DREAMY goes quickly to the window and cautiously searches the street below with his eyes*).

MAMMY. (*uneasily*) Dreamy. (*He hurries back and takes her hand again*) I got de mos' 'culiar feelin' in my head. Seems like de years done all roll away an' I'm back down home in de ole place whar you' was bo'n. (*After a short pause*) Does yo' 'member yo' own mammy, chile?

DREAMY. No.

MAMMY. Yo' was too young, I s'pec'. Yo' was on'y a baby w'en she tuck 'n' die. My Sal was a mighty fine 'oman, if I does say hit m'se'f.

DREAMY. (*fdgeting nervously*) Don' you talk, Mammy. Better you'd close yo' eyes an' rest.

MAMMY. (*with a trembling smile—weakly*) Shoo! W'at is I done come ter wid my own gran' chile bossin' me 'bout. I wants ter talk. You knows you ain't give me much chance ter talk wid yo' dese las' years.

DREAMY. (*sullenly*) I ain't had de time, Mammy; but you knows I was always game ter give you anything I got. (*A note of appeal in his voice*) You knows dat, don' you, Mammy?

MAMMY. Sho'ly I does. Yo' been a good boy, Dreamy; an'

if dere's one thing more'n 'nother makes me feel like I mighter done good in de sight er de Lawd, hits dat I raised yo' fum a baby.

DREAMY. (*clearing his throat gruffly*) Don' you talk so much, Mammy.

MAMMY. (*querulously*) I gotter talk, chile. Come times—w'en I git thinkin' yere in de bed—w'at's gwine ter come ter me a'mos' b'fore I knows hit—like de thief in de night—en den I gits skeered. But w'en I talks wid yo' I ain't skeered a bit.

DREAMY. (*defiantly*) You ain't got nothin' to be skeered of—not when de Dreamy's here.

MAMMY. (*after a slight pause, faintly*) Dere's a singin' in my ears all de time. (*Seized by a sudden religious ecstasy*). Maybe hits de singin' hymns o' de blessed angels I done heah fum above. (*Wildly*) Bless Gawd! Bless Gawd! Pity dis po' ole sinner.

DREAMY. (*with an uneasy glance at the door*) Ssshh, Mammy! Don' shout so loud.

MAMMY. De pictures keep a whizzin' fo' my eyes like de thread in a sewing machine. Seem 's if all my life done fly back ter me all ter once. (*With a flickering smile—weakly*) Does you know how yo' come by dat nickname dey alls call yo'—de Dreamy? Is I ever tole yo' dat?

DREAMY. (*evidently lying*) No, Mammy.

MAMMY. Hit was one mawnin' b'fo' we come No'th. Me an' yo' mammy—yo' was des a baby in arms den—

DREAMY. (*hears a noise from the hall*) Ssshh, Mammy! For God's sake, don't speak for a minute. I hears somep'n. (*He stares at the door, his face hardening savagely, and listens intently*).

MAMMY. (*in a frightened tone*) W'at's de matter, chile?

DREAMY. Ssshh! Somebody comin'. (*A noise of footsteps comes from the hall stairway. Dreamy springs to his feet*) Leggo my hand, Mammy—jest for a secon'. I come right back to you. (*He pulls his hand from the old woman's grip. She falls back on the pillows moaning. Dreamy pulls a large automatic revolver from his coat pocket and tiptoes quickly to the door. As he does so there is a sharp rap. He stands listening at the crack for a moment, then noiselessly turns the key, unlocking the door. Then he crouches low down by the wall so that the door, when opened, will hide him from the sight of anyone entering. There is another and louder rap on the door*).

MAMMY. (*groaning*) W'at's dat, Dreamy? Whar is yo'?

DREAMY. Ssshh! (*Then muffling his voice he calls*): Come in. (*He raises the revolver in his hand. The door is pushed open and Irene enters, her eyes peering wildly about the room. Her bosom is heaving as if she had been running and she is trembling all over with terrified excitement*).

IRENE. (*not seeing him calls out questioningly*) Dreamy?

DREAMY. (*lowering his revolver and rising to his feet roughly*) Close dat door!

IRENE. (*whirling about with a startled cry*) Dreamy!

DREAMY. (*shutting the door and locking it—aggressively*) Shut yo' big mouth, gal, or I'll bang it shut for you! You want let de whole block know where I is?

IRENE. (*hysterical with joy—trying to put her arms around him*) Bless God, I foun' you at last!

DREAMY. (*pushing her away roughly*) Leggo o' me! Why you come here follerin' me? Ain't yo' got 'nuff sense in yo' fool

head ter know de bulls is liable ter shadow you when dey knows you's my gal? Is you pinin' ter git me kotched an' sent to de chair?

IRENE. (*terrified*) No, no!

DREAMY. (*savagely*) I gotter mind ter hand you one you won't ferget! (*He draws back his fist*).

IRENE. (*shrinking away*) Don' you hit me, Dreamy! Don' you beat me up now! Jest lemme 'xplain, dat's all.

MAMMY. (*in a frightened whisper*) Dreamy! Come yere to me. 'Whar is yo'? I'se skeered!

DREAMY. (*in a fierce whisper to Irene*) Can dat bull or I'll fix you. (*He hurries to the old woman and pats her hand*) Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY. Who dat yo's a-talkin' wid?

DREAMY. On'y a fren' o' Ceely Ann's, Mammy, askin' where she is. I gotter talk wid her some mo' yit. You sleep, Mammy? (*He goes to Irene*).

MAMMY. (*feebly*) Don' yo' leave me, Dreamy.

DREAMY. I'se right here wid you. (*Fiercely, to Irene*) You git the hell outa here, you Reeny, you heah—quick! Dis ain't no place for de likes o' you wid ole Mammy dyin'.

IRENE. (*with a horrified glance at the bed*) Is she dyin'—honest?

DREAMY. Sssh! She's croakin', I tells yo'—an' I gotter stay wid her fo' a while—an' I ain't got no time ter be pesterin' wid you. Beat it, now! Beat it outa here befo' I knocks yo' cold, git me?

IRENE. Jest wait a secon' for de love o' Gawd. I got somep'n ter tell you—

DREAMY. I don' want'er hear yo' fool talk. (*He gives her a push toward the door*) Git outa dis, you hear me?

IRENE. I'll go. I'm going soon—soon's ever I've had my say. Lissen, Dreamy! It's about de coppers I come ter tell you.

DREAMY. (*quickly*) Why don' you say dat befo'? What you know, gal?

IRENE. Just befo' I come here to find you de first time, de Madam sends me out to Murphy's ter git her a bottle o' gin. I goes in de side door but I ain't rung de bell yet. I hear yo' name spoken an' I stops ter lissen. Dey was three or four men in de back room. Dey don't hear me open de outside door, an' dey can't see me, 'course. It was Big Sullivan from de Central Office talkin'. He was talkin' 'bout de killin' you done last night and he tells dem odders he's heerd 'bout de ole woman gittin' so sick, and dat if dey don't fin' you none of de udder places dey's lookin', dey's goin' wait for you here. Dey s'pecks you come here say good-by to Mammy befo' you make yo' git-away.

DREAMY. It's aw right den. Dey ain't come yit. Twister Smith done tole me de coast was clear befo' I come here.

IRENE. Dat was den. It ain't now.

DREAMY. (*excitedly*) What you mean, gal?

IRENE. I was comin' in by de front way when I sees some pusson hidin' in de doorway 'cross de street. I gits a good peek at him and when I does—it's a copper, Dreamy, suah's yo' born, in his plain clo'se, and he's a watchin' de door o' dis house like a cat.

DREAMY. (*goes to the window and stealthily crouching by the dark side peeks out. One glance is enough. He comes quickly*

back to Irene) You got de right dope, gal. It's dat Mickey. I knows him even in de dark. Dey're waitin'—so dey ain't wise I'm here yit, dat's suah.

IRENE. But dey'll git wise befo' long.

DREAMY. He don' pipe you comin' in here?

IRENE. I skulked roun' and sneaked in by de back way froo de yard. Dey ain't none o' dem dar yit. (*Raising her voice—excitedly*) But dere will be soon. Dey're boun' to git wise to dat back door. You ain't got no time to lose, Dreamy. Come on wid me now. Git back where yo' safe. It's de cooler for you certain if you stays here. Dey'll git you like a rat in de trap. (*As Dreamy hesitates*) For de love of Gawd, Dreamy, wake up to youse'f!

DREAMY. (*uncertainly*) I can't beat it—wid Mammy here alone. My luck done turn bad all my life, if I does.

IRENE. (*fiercely*) What good's you gittin' pinched and sent to de chair gwine do her? Is you crazy mad? Come away wid me, I tells you!

DREAMY. (*half-persuaded—hesitatingly*) I gotter speak wid her. You wait a secon'.

IRENE. (*wringing her hands*) Dis ain't no time now for fussin' wid her.

DREAMY. (*gruffly*) Shut up! (*He makes a motion for her to remain where she is and goes over to the bed—in a low voice*) Mammy.

MAMMY. (*hazily*) Dat you, Dreamy? (*She tries to reach out her hand and touch him*).

DREAMY. I'm gwine leave you—jest for a moment, Mammy. I'll send de word for Ceely Ann—

MAMMY. (*wideawake in an instant—with intense alarm*)

Don' yo' do dat! Don' yo' move one step out er yere or yo'll be sorry, Dreamy.

DREAMY. (*apprehensively*) I gotter go, I tells you. I'll come back.

MAMMY. (*with wild grief*) O good Lawd! W'en I's drawin' de las' bre'fs in dis po' ole body—(*Frenziedly*) De Lawd have mercy! Good Lawd have mercy!

DREAMY. (*fearfully*) Stop dat racket, Mammy! You bring all o' dem down on my head! (*He rushes over and crouches by the window again to peer out—in relieved tones*) He ain't heerd nothin'. He's dar yit.

IRENE. (*imploringly*) Come on, Dreamy! (*Mammy groans with pain*).

DREAMY. (*hurrying to the bed*) What's de matter, Mammy?

IRENE. (*stamping her foot*) Dreamy! Fo' Gawd's sake!

MAMMY. Lawd have mercy! (*She groans*) Gimme yo' han', chile. Yo' ain't gwine leave me now, Dreamy? Yo' ain't, is yo'? Yo' ole Mammy won't bodder yo' long. Yo' know w'at yo' promise me, Dreamy! Yo' promise yo' sacred word yo' stay wid me till de en'. (*With an air of somber prophecy—slowly*) If yo' leave me now, yo' ain't gwine git no bit er luck s'long's yo' live, I tells yo' dat!

DREAMY. (*frightened—pleadingly*) Don' you say dat, Mammy!

IRENE. Come on, Dreamy!

DREAMY. (*slowly*) I can't. (*In awed tones*) Don' you hear de curse she puts on me if I does?

MAMMY. (*her voice trembling with weak tears*) Don' go, chile!

DREAMY. (*hastily*) I won't leave dis room, I swar ter you!

(Relieved by the finality in his tones, the old woman sighs and closes her eyes. Dreamy frees his hand from hers and goes to Irene. He speaks with a strange calm) De game's up, gal. You better beat it while de goin's good.

IRENE. *(aghast)* You gwine stay?

DREAMY. I gotter, gal. I ain't gwine agin her dyin' curse. No, suh!

IRENE. *(pitifully)* But dey'll git you suah!

DREAMY. *(slapping the gun in his pocket significantly)* Dey'll have some gittin'. I git some o' dem fust. *(With gloomy determination)* Dey don't git dis chicken alive! Lawd Jesus, no suh. Not de Dreamy!

IRENE. *(helplessly)* Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy! *(She goes to the window—with a short cry)* He's talkin' wid someone. Dere's two o' dem. *(Dreamy hurries to her side).*

DREAMY. I knows him—de udder. It's Big Sullivan. *(Pulling her away roughly)* Come out o' dat! Dey'll see you. *(He pushes her toward the door)* Dey won't wait down dere much longer. Dey'll be comin' up here soon. *(Prayerfully, with a glance at the bed)* I hopes she's croaked by den,' fo' Christ I does!

IRENE. *(as if she couldn't believe it)* Den you ain't gwine save youse'f while dere's time? *(Pleadingly)* Oh, Dreamy, you can make it yit!

DREAMY. De game's up, I tole you. *(With gloomy fatalism)* I s'pect it hatter be. Yes, suh. Dey'd git me in de long run anyway—and wid her curse de luck'd be agin me. *(With sudden anger)* Git outa here, you Reeny! You ain't aimin' ter get shot up too, is you? Ain't no sense in dat.

IRENE. *(fiercely)* I'se stayin' too, here wid you!

DREAMY. No you isn't! None o' dat bull! You ain't got no mix in dis jamb.

IRENE. Yes, I is! Ain't you my man?

DREAMY. Don' make no dif. I don't wanta git you in Dutch more'n you is. It's bad 'nuff fo' me. (*He pushes her toward the door*) Blow while you kin, I tells you!

IRENE. (*resisting him*) No, Dreamy! What I care if dey kills me? I'se gwine stick wid you.

DREAMY. (*gives her another push*) No, you isn't, gal. (*Unlocking the door—relentlessly*) Out wid you!

IRENE. (*hysterically*) You can't gimme no bum's rush. I'm gwine stay.

DREAMY. (*gloomily*) On'y one thing fo' me ter do den. (*He hits her on the side of the face with all his might knocking her back against the wall where she sways as if about to fall. Then he opens the door and grabs her two arms from behind*) Out wid you, gal!

IRENE. (*moaning*) Dreamy! Dreamy! Lemme stay wid you! (*He pushes her into the hallway and holds her there at arm's length*) Fo' Gawd's sake, Dreamy!

MAMMY. (*whimperingly*) Dreamy! I'se skeered!

IRENE. (*from the hall*) I'se gwine stay right here at de door. You might s'well lemme in.

DREAMY. (*frowning*) Don' do dat, Reeny. (*Then with a sudden idea*) You run roun' and tell de gang what's up. Maybe dey git me outa dis, you hear?

IRENE. (*with eager hope*) You think dey kin?

DREAMY. Never kin tell. You hurry—through de back yard, 'member—an' don' git pinched, now.

IRENE. (*eagerly*) I'm gwine! I'll bring dem back!

DREAMY. (*stands listening to her retreating footsteps—then shuts and locks the door—gloomily to himself*) Ain't no good. Dey dassent do nothin'—but I hatter git her outa dis somehow.

MAMMY. (*groaning*) Dreamy!

DREAMY. Here I is. Jest a secon'. (*He goes to the window*).

MAMMY. (*weakly*) I feels—like—de en's comin'. Oh, Lawd, Lawd!

DREAMY. (*absent-mindedly*) Yes, Mammy. (*Aloud to himself*) Dey're sneakin' cross de street. Dere's anudder of 'em. Dat's tree. (*He glances around the room quickly—then hurries over and takes hold of the chest of drawers. As he does so the old woman commences to croon shrilly to herself*).

DREAMY. Stop dat noise, Mammy! Stop dat noise!

MAMMY. (*wanderingly*) Dat's how come yo' got dat—dat nickname—Dreamy.

DREAMY. Yes, Mammy. (*He puts the lamp on the floor to the rear of the door, turning it down low. Then he carries the chest of drawers over and places it against the door as a barricade*).

MAMMY. (*rambling as he does this—very feebly*) Does yo' know—I gives you dat name—w'en yo's des a baby—lyin' in my arms—

DREAMY. Yes, Mammy.

MAMMY. Down by de crik—under de ole willow—whar I uster take yo'—wid yo' big eyes a-chasin'—de sun flitterin' froo de grass—an' out on de water—

DREAMY. (*takes the revolver from his pocket and puts it on top of the chest of drawers*) Dey don' git de Dreamy alive—not for de chair! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY. An' yo' was 'always—a-lookin'—an' a-thinkin' ter yo'se'f—an' yo' big eyes jest a-dreamin' an' a-dreamin'—an' dat's w'en I gives yo' dat nickname—Dreamy—Dreamy——

DREAMY. Yes, Mammy. (*He listens at the crack of the door—in a tense whisper*) I don' hear dem—but dey're comin' sneakin' up de stairs, I knows it.

MAMMY. (*faintly*) Whar is yo', Dreamy? I can't—ha'dly—breathe—no mo'. Oh, Lawd have mercy!

DREAMY. (*goes over to the bed*) Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY. (*speaking with difficulty*) Yo'—kneel down—chile—say a pray'r—Oh, Lawd!

DREAMY. Jest a secon', Mammy. (*He goes over and gets his revolver and comes back*).

MAMMY. Gimme—yo' hand—chile. (*Dreamy gives her his left hand. The revolver is in his right. He stares nervously at the door*) An' yo' kneel down—pray fo' me. (*Dreamy gets on one knee beside the bed. There is a sound from the hallway as if someone had made a misstep on the stairs—then silence. Dreamy starts and half aims his gun in the direction of the door. Mammy groans weakly*) I'm dyin', chile. Hit's de en'. You pray for me—out loud—so's I can heah. Oh, Lawd! (*She gasps to catch her breath*).

DREAMY. (*abstractedly, not having heard a word she has said*) Yes, Mammy. (*Aloud to himself with an air of grim determination as if he were making a pledge*) Dey don't git de Dreamy! Not while he's 'live! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY. (*falteringly*) Dat's right—yo' pray—Lawd Jesus—Lawd Jesus——(*There is another slight sound of movement from the hallway*).

(*The Curtain Falls*)

